

# REVEGETATION AND HABITAT REHABILITATION PLAN

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## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Rehabilitation Plan is to ensure that areas cleared or impacted during construction activities within the development footprint for the Zionsheuvel Solar PV Facility that are not required for operation are rehabilitated to their original state before the operation phase commences, and that the risk of erosion from these areas is reduced. The purpose of the Rehabilitation Plan for the development footprint can be summarised as follows:

- » Achieve long-term stabilisation of all disturbed areas.
- » Re-vegetate all disturbed areas with suitable local plant species.
- » Minimise visual impact of disturbed areas.
- » Ensure that disturbed areas are rehabilitated to a condition similar to that found prior to disturbance.

This Rehabilitation Plan should be read in conjunction with other site-specific plans, including the Erosion Management Plan, Alien Invasive Management Plan and Plant Rescue and Protection Plan. Prior to the commencement of construction, a detailed Rehabilitation Plan and Method Statement for the site should be compiled with the aid of a suitably qualified, professionally registered specialist (with a botanical or equivalent qualification).

## 2. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE SITE

Zionsheuvel Solar Energy (Pty) Ltd (a consortium consisting of Akuo Energy Afrique, Africoast Investments and Golden Sunshine Trading) proposed to develop the Zionsheuvel Solar PV Facility and its associated electrical infrastructure on Remainder of Farm Leeuwberg 79 in the Renosterberg Local Municipality in the greater Pixley ka Seme District Municipality in the Northern Cape Province. The project site is located approximately 20km north of Philipstown and 30km west of Petrusville

The project area is situated within the Nama Karoo Biome and (SANBI, 2018). The Nama Karoo Biome is found in the central plateau of the western half of South Africa. The geology underlying the biome is varied, as the distribution of this biome is determined primarily by rainfall. The rain falls in summer, and varies between 100 and 520mm per year. This also determines the predominant soil type - over 80% of the area is covered by a lime-rich, weakly developed soil over rock. Although less than 5% of rain reaches the rivers, the high erodibility of soils poses a major problem where overgrazing occurs (SANBI, 2019).

The **Northern Upper Karoo** is described as follows:

Northern Upper Karoo occurs in the Northern Cape and Free State Provinces. It occurs on flat to gently sloping terrain with isolated hills of Upper Karoo Hardeveld in the south and Vaalbos Rocky Shrubland in the northeast with interspersed pans. It is a shrubland dominated by dwarf karoo shrubs, grasses and *Acacia mellifera* subsp. *Deti-nens* and some other low trees. It occurs at an altitude of 1 000 to 1 500 m.

### Important Taxa

Important plant taxa are those species that have a high abundance, a frequent occurrence or are prominent in the landscape within a particular vegetation type (Mucina & Rutherford, 2006). The following species are important in the Gamka Karoo (dominant):

- » **Small trees:** *Acacia mellifera* subsp. *detinens*, *Boscia albitrunca*.
- » **Tall Shrubs:** *Lycium cinereum* (d), *L. horridum*, *L. oxycarpum*, *L. schizocalyx*, *Rhigozum trichotomum*.
- » **Low Shrubs:** *Chrysocoma ciliata* (d), *Gnidia polycephala* (d), *Pentzia calcarea* (d), *P. globosa* (d), *P. incana* (d), *P. spinescens* (d), *Rosenia humilis* (d), *Amphiglossa triflora*, *Aptosimum marlothii*, *A. spinescens*, *Asparagus glaucus*, *Barleria rigida*, *Berkheya annectens*, *Eriocephalus ericoides* subsp. *ericoides*, *E. glandulosus*, *E. spinescens*, *Euryops asparagoides*, *Felicia muricata*, *Helichrysum lucilioides*, *Hermannia spinosa*, *Leucas capensis*, *Limeum aethiopicum*, *Melolobium candicans*, *Microloma armatum*, *Osteospermum leptolobum*, *O. spinescens*, *Pegolettia retrofracta*, *Pentzia lanata*, *Phyllanthus maderaspatensis*, *Plinthus karooicus*, *Pteronia glauca*, *P. sordida*, *Selago geniculata*, *S. saxatilis*, *Tetragonia arbuscula*, *Zygophyllum lichtensteinianum*.
- » **Succulent Shrubs:** *Hertia pallens*, *Salsola calluna*, *S. glabrescens*, *S. rabieana*, *S. tuberculata*, *Zygophyllum flexuosum*.
- » **Semiparasitic Shrub:** *Thesium hystrix* (d),
- » **Herbs:** *Chamaesyce inaequilatera*, *Convolvulus sagittatus*, *Dicoma capensis*, *Gazania krebsiana*, *Hermannia comosa*, *Indigofera alternans*, *Lessertia pauciflora*, *Radyera urens*, *Sesamum capense*, *Sutera pinnatifida*, *Tribulus terrestris*, *Vahlia capensis*.
- » **Succulent Herb:** *Psilocaulon coriarium*.
- » **Geophytic Herb:** *Moraea pallida*.
- » **Graminoids:** *Aristida adscensionis* (d), *A. congesta* (d), *A. diffusa* (d), *Enneapogon desvauxii* (d), *Eragrostis lehmanniana* (d), *E. obtusa* (d), *E. truncata* (d), *Sporobolus fimbriatus* (d), *Stipagrostis obtusa* (d), *Eragrostis bicolor*, *E. porosa*, *Fingerhuthia africana*, *Heteropogon contortus*, *Stipagrostis ciliata*, *Themeda triandra*, *Tragus berteronianus*, *T. koelerioides*, *T. racemosus*.

According to Mucina & Rutherford (2006), this vegetation type is classified as Least Threatened. The national target for conservation protection is 21% with some statutorily conserved and about 2% transformed.

### 3. REHABILITATION METHODS AND PRACTICES

The following general management practices should be encouraged or strived for:

- » Clearing of invaded areas should be conducted as per the Alien Management Plan, included in the Environmental Management Programme (EMPr).
- » No harvesting of vegetation may be undertaken outside the area to be disturbed by construction activities.
- » Indigenous plant material must be kept separate from alien material.
- » Indigenous seeds may be harvested for purposes of revegetation in areas that are free of alien invasive vegetation, either at the project area prior to clearance or from suitable neighbouring sites.
- » Topsoil should be reserved wherever possible on the project area, to be utilised during rehabilitation.
- » Sods used for revegetation should be obtained directly from the project area, but not from the sensitive areas. Sods should contain at least a 50mm topsoil layer and be minimally disturbed, in particular to existing root systems. Sods must ideally be obtained from areas as close as possible to the region that is to be rehabilitated.
- » Water used for the irrigation of re-vegetated areas should be free of chlorine and other pollutants that might have a detrimental effect on the plants.
- » All seeded, planted, or sodded grass areas and all shrubs or trees planted are to be irrigated at regular intervals.

- » On steep slopes and areas where seed and organic matter retention is low, it is recommended that soil savers are used to stabilise the soil surface. Soil savers are man-made materials, usually constructed of organic material such as hemp or jute and are usually applied in areas where traditional rehabilitation techniques are not likely to succeed.
- » In areas where soil saver is used, it should be pegged down to ensure that it captures soil and organic matter flowing over the surface.
- » The final rehabilitated area should resemble the current composition and structure of the soil as far as practicably possible.
- » Progressive rehabilitation is an important element of the rehabilitation strategy and should be implemented where feasible.
- » No construction equipment, vehicles or unauthorised personnel should be allowed onto areas that have been rehabilitated.
- » Where rehabilitation sites are located within actively grazed areas, they should be fenced off, this must be undertaken in consultation with the landowner.
- » Any runnels, erosion channels or wash-aways developing after revegetation should be backfilled and consolidated and the areas restored to a proper stable condition.
- » Re-vegetated areas should be monitored frequently. Where signs of inadequate surface coverage are evident after two growing seasons, re-vegetation should be done from scratch. Adequate recovery must be assessed by a qualified botanist or rehabilitation specialist.
- » The stockpiled vegetation from the clearing operations should be reduced to mulch where possible and retained along with topsoil to encourage seed bank regrowth and soil fertility.
- » Mulches must be collected in such a manner as to restrict the loss of seed.
- » Mulch must be stored for as short a period as possible.
- » Mulch is to be harvested from areas that are to be denuded of vegetation during construction activities, provided that they are free of seed-bearing alien invasive plants.
- » Where herbicides are used to clear vegetation, species-specific chemicals should be applied to individual plants only. General spraying should be strictly prohibited, and only the correct herbicide type should be applied.
- » Once rehabilitated, areas should be protected to prevent trampling and erosion.
- » Fencing should be removed once a sound vegetative cover has been achieved.

#### **4. MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP ACTION**

Throughout the lifecycle of the development, regular monitoring and adaptive management must be in place to detect any new degradation of rehabilitated areas. During the construction phase, the Environmental Office (EO) and Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Contractor will be responsible for initiating and maintaining a suitable monitoring system. Once the development is operational, the Developer / O&M Operator will need to identify a suitable entity that will be able to take over and maintain the monitoring cycle and initiate adaptive management as soon as it is required. Monitoring personnel must be adequately trained.

The following are the minimum criteria that should be monitored:

- » Associated nature and stability of surface soils.
- » Re-emergence of alien and invasive plant species. If noted, remedial action must be taken immediately, as per the alien management plan and mitigation measures contained within the EMPr.

Rehabilitation success, monitoring and follow-up actions are important to achieve the desired cover and soil protection. The following monitoring protocol is recommended:

- » Rehabilitated areas should be monitored (responsibility of the EO) on a weekly basis throughout the construction phase and on a monthly basis thereafter and to the point where the area has been rehabilitated to a satisfactory level.
- » Ensure that steep slopes are not de-vegetated unnecessarily and subsequently become hydrophobic (i.e., have increased runoff and a decreased infiltration rate) increasing the erosion potential.
- » Soil loss is related to the length of time that soils are exposed prior to rehabilitation or stabilisation. Therefore, the timeframe between construction activities and rehabilitation should be minimised. Phased construction and progressive rehabilitation, where practically possible, are therefore important elements of the erosion control and rehabilitation strategy.
- » Any areas showing erosion, should be adaptively managed with particular erosion control measures, depending on the extent of the erosion.

If the current state of the environment prior to construction (which will be disturbed during the construction phase) is not achieved post impact, within the specified rehabilitation period, maintenance of these areas must continue until an acceptable state is achieved (excluding alien plant species or weeds). Additional rehabilitation methods may be necessary to achieve the current state before construction commenced.

Monitoring of the rehabilitation success, as well as follow-up adaptive management, combined with the clearing of emerging alien plant species should all continue for as long as is considered necessary, depending on regrowth rates.