



BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT:

BASIC ASSESSMENT AND WATER USE LICENCE APPLICATION

EIA REF: Not yet available

Date: 11 September 2015

THE PROPOSED 'CONSTRUCTION OF NCIBIDWANE RIVER  
CROSSING ON D1240' MAHENDENI AREA, IMBABAZANE  
MUNICIPALITY,  
KZN

PURPOSE OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to provide background information on the proposed project, to obtain comments and contributions from interested and affected parties and stakeholders with regards to environmental and socio-economic issues, as well considerations for the water use licence application, for the proposed project.

PROJECT BACKGROUND, DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

KZN Department of Transport proposes to undertake the construction of Ncibidwane River Crossing at Mahendeni Ward 2.

Ncibidwane River Crossing is situated in Mahandeni Area near Escourt within the Escourt District of the KZN DOT. Mahendeni area is situated in Ward 2 of Imbabazane Municipality within the Uthukela District Municipality.

There is a current crossing that has been damaged by flood, and therefore needs to be replaced. The new bridge will replace the existing structure and will be designed to cater for peak flood levels.

Co-ordinates of the location of the bridge are stated below:

Co-ordinates for site:

Latitude /Longitude	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
South	29	14	20.08
East	29	37	40.06

## BIOPHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES OF PROPOSED SITE

As taken from the Imbabazane municipal IDP, soils in the general area are shallow and friable having been derived from basalt, sandstones, mudstones and shales and slopes are generally moderate to steep. Human uses of the environment include overgrazing, cultivation on steep slopes, removal of indigenous forests (for building, firewood and cultivation of cannabis) and the penetration of human settlement into areas which should ideally fall under conservation management.

The area below the District Management Area (DMA) is largely used for livestock farming with some cultivation of crops and timber (ILM IDP 2005). The natural pastures is a fire maintained grassland, which is used for grazing, characterised by *Hyparrhenia* grasslands with scattered pockets of *Acacia species* spread throughout the area (ILM IDP 2005). In the absence of fire the development towards *podocarpus* forests would occur with grasses such as *cymbopogon* spp. and tall *Hyparrhenia* spp. and the trees *Leucosidea sericea* and *Buddleja salviifolia* being the forest precursors. (K Camp;Bio resource groups of KwaZulu-Natal Highland and Montane).

The project site is characterised by grassland and immediate flat topography of the floodplain. The site is generally marked by grassland and shrubs suited to wet conditions, with a distinct lack of larger, woody species characteristic of riparian areas. The soils appear to be conducive to erosion.

It is not expected that biodiversity will be significantly impacted upon, due to the site comprising partially disturbed grassland and with there being no large tree species on the site and lack of significant riparian vegetation. However, the replacement of the current low level, constraining structure, will improve the flow regime of the water course.

## NEED AND DESIRABILITY

The safety of the current crossing is low and the risk of complete structural failure is high, having already been damaged by flood. The current bridge in its present state only carries low frequency lightweight vehicles. The new Ncibidwane Bridge has thus been deemed as a necessity, to replace the structurally unstable and undermined current bridge crossing. The new bridge will be an elevated structure which allow for safer crossing of vehicles and pedestrians, and will cater for increased traffic flow volumes.

The removal of the current low level, constraining structure, will improve the flow regime of the water course, and the building of an elevated structure will ensure reduced impact on flow regime whilst providing a safe crossing.

The proposed project will create employment opportunities during the construction phase, which will stimulate the local economy and at the same time providing a social benefit.

## ANTICIPATED ISSUES

Most of the environmental impacts of potential significance will be directly associated with the construction phase of the project.

These include:

- ❑ Impacts on biodiversity
- ❑ Water quality and aquatic impacts during construction
- ❑ Dust emissions due to construction
- ❑ Erosion
- ❑ Socio-economic

These impacts will be mitigated through the methods and specifications that will be outlined in the Environmental Management Program report.

### **SPECIALIST STUDIES**

Specialist studies will be commissioned for the EIA and WUL processes, which include heritage and a combined ecological and wetland/riparian study.

### **APPLICABLE LEGISLATION**

In accordance with the Government Notice Regulation 983, as promulgated on 04 December 2014 in terms of chapter five of the National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998, a 'listed activity' will therefore be triggered. These activities, as cited in Listing Notice 1 of 2014 under sections 24(2), 24(5), 24D and 44, read with section 47A(1)(b) of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998).

Further, in terms of National Water Act, 1998, a WUL is required. The aforementioned regulations set out the procedures and criteria for the submission, processing, consideration and decisions of environmental assessment applications. This involves amongst others, the identification and engagement of relevant stakeholders.

Other applicable legislation that will be consulted includes *inter alia*, the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004, and the South African Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL AND WUL PROCESS**

The environmental assessment is a process of collecting, organising, analysing, interpreting and communicating relevant information to competent authorities to obtain an independent and objective view of the potential environmental (biophysical and socio-economic) impacts that could arise during the construction and operation of the proposed project.

In terms of S21 (i) and (c) of the National Water Act, water use licence is required from Department of Water and Sanitation prior to altering bed, banks, course and characteristics of a watercourse, as well as for any diversion or impedance to the course. Studies required as an accompaniment to the application include the SASS V and PES.

Henwood & Nxumalo Consulting Engineers as the independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner, appointed by Ibhongo Consulting on behalf of KZN DoT, is responsible for the preparation of a BAR and EMPr that will be submitted to the KwaZulu Natal Department of Economic, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, hereinafter referred to as 'the Department, or

EDTEA', for review. The objectives of the report are to ensure that environmental impacts are taken into consideration, effective stakeholder engagement has been conducted and all the information contained therein is sufficient to enable the Department to make an informed decision on the proposed activity. The EIA and studies will then form part of the application for the WUL process.

The granting or refusal of an Environmental Authorisation and a WUL will depend on the information provided in the report.

### **HOW CAN YOU BECOME INVOLVED?**

A transparent stakeholder engagement process is the foundation of any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) which will enable IAP's and stakeholders to influence the course of the environmental investigation and outcome of the EA application. The key objective is to provide sufficient information on an ongoing basis to allow IAPs, stakeholders and the community or individuals the opportunity to comment on the all the key findings of the EIA process.

It is important that relevant stakeholders are identified and involved in the /stakeholder engagement/public participation process from the outset of the proposed project.

Every proposed project has the potential to affect the natural and social environments, both on the proposed site as well as surrounding environment. It is therefore important that you as an interested and/or affected party or stakeholder comment on the proposed development and raise issues or concerns that you feel need to be considered during the proposed planning and implementation process.

This can be done by:

- Registering yourself and/or your organisation as an interested and affected party (I&AP).
- Sending us any comments you may have on the proposed project.

**Comments must be sent to: (comments are due by the 22 October 2015; thereafter you will be given a chance to comment on the draft bar)**

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**KEY SITE IMAGES**

**Photo A: Ncibidwane river crossing**



**Photo B : The Ncibidwane River**



