

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT**

### **Proposed Cultivation of Virgin Land on Lilydale Farm, near Creighton, Ingwe Local Municipality**

April 2013



#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT?**

The purpose of this document is to:

- ◆ Inform Interested and Affected Parties (IAPs) about the proposed project and request their participation;
- ◆ Provide a brief background on the proposed project; and
- ◆ Explain the aims and objectives of the Basic Assessment Process.



#### **WHAT IS PROPOSED?**

The Applicant is the Eastwolds Trust and is represented by Mr Rob Stapylton-Smith. The Applicant, who is also the landowner, wishes to cultivate 25 ha of land on his property for the purposes of maize cultivation, to supply feed for dairy cattle. The Applicant has recently purchased this property and another property on the southern boundary of his current farming operations and is in the process of consolidating these portions of land with his farm. The reason for his purchase of these portions of land is as follows:

The Applicant is currently leasing 27ha of land from a neighbouring emerging farmer, Mr Ducky Ngcobo, which is cultivated for maize and which he currently uses for feed. Mr Ngcobo bought the neighbouring property approximately 13 years ago, when he expressed a desire to start dairy farming. Over the years, the Applicant has assisted Mr Ngcobo in establishing his dairy farming enterprise and has provided the following to him:

- ◆ Livestock (in excess of 100 head);
- ◆ Milking equipment;
- ◆ Maize silage;
- ◆ Preparation of pastures and cultivated maize lands;
- ◆ Assistance with establishing milk supply contract to Creighton Dairies;
- ◆ Free grazing of cattle on his farm; and
- ◆ Soil sampling and fertilisation advice.

Mr Ngcobo has recently advised the Applicant that he now needs this cultivated land back for his own farming operations, which are expanding, largely as a result of the Applicant's assistance. Mr Ngcobo therefore wishes to cancel the lease with The Applicant, as he now needs that land for his own feed supply. Thus the Applicant is forced to investigate alternative areas for cultivation.



#### **WHERE IS THE PROPERTY?**

The proposed cultivation site is located on Lilydale Farm, near Creighton, Ingwe Local Municipality, Sisonke District Municipality. The property is known as Proposed Portion A of Farm S63 No. 17637 (this portion is in the process of being consolidated with the remainder of the farm). The property is a total of 223.20 ha in size and is zoned for agriculture. Surrounding land use includes agriculture (cultivation, timber), natural grasslands, wetlands and dams.

Geographic co-ordinates for the centre of the site are as follows:

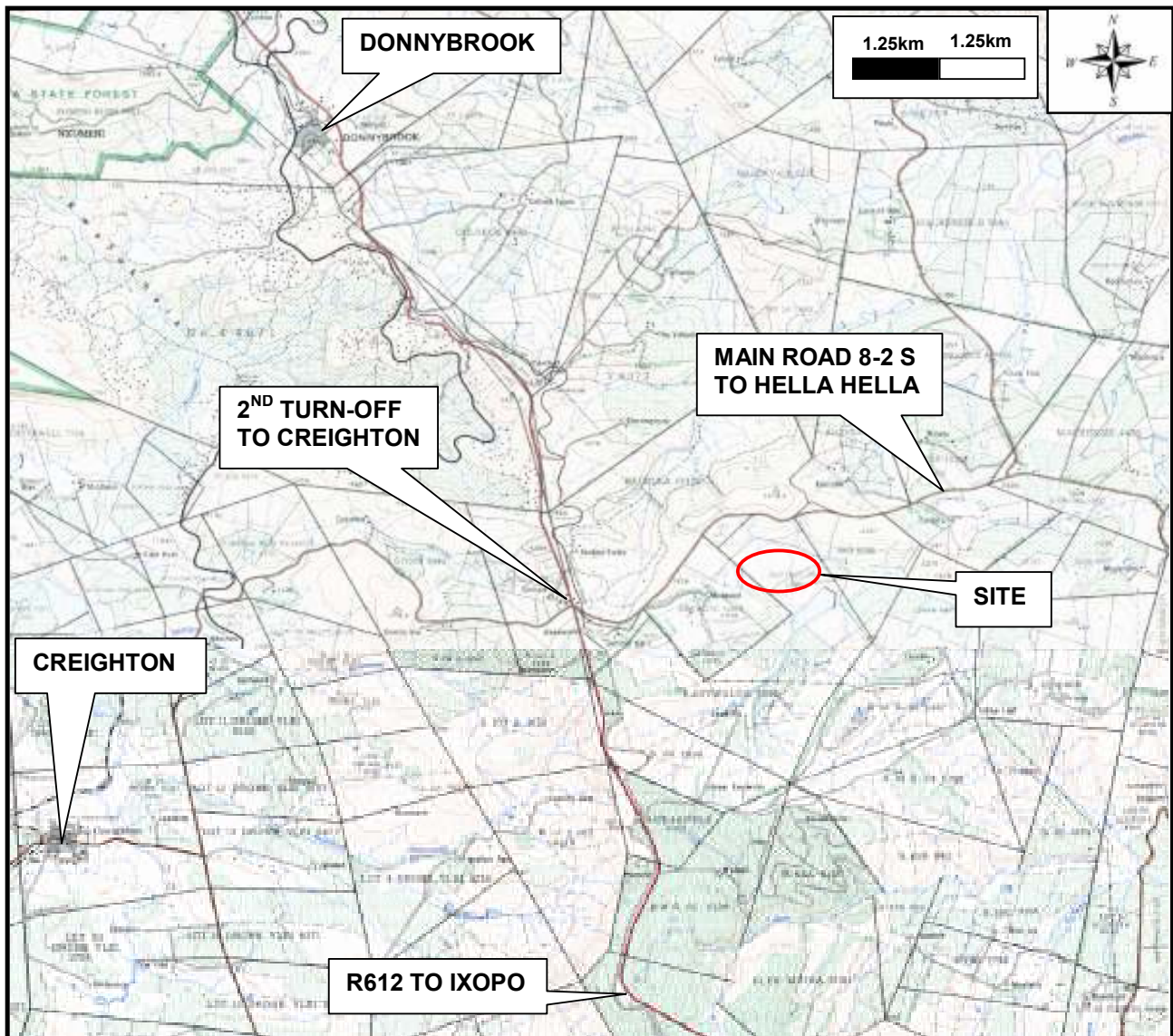
29° 59' 08.5" S

29° 56' 33.8" E

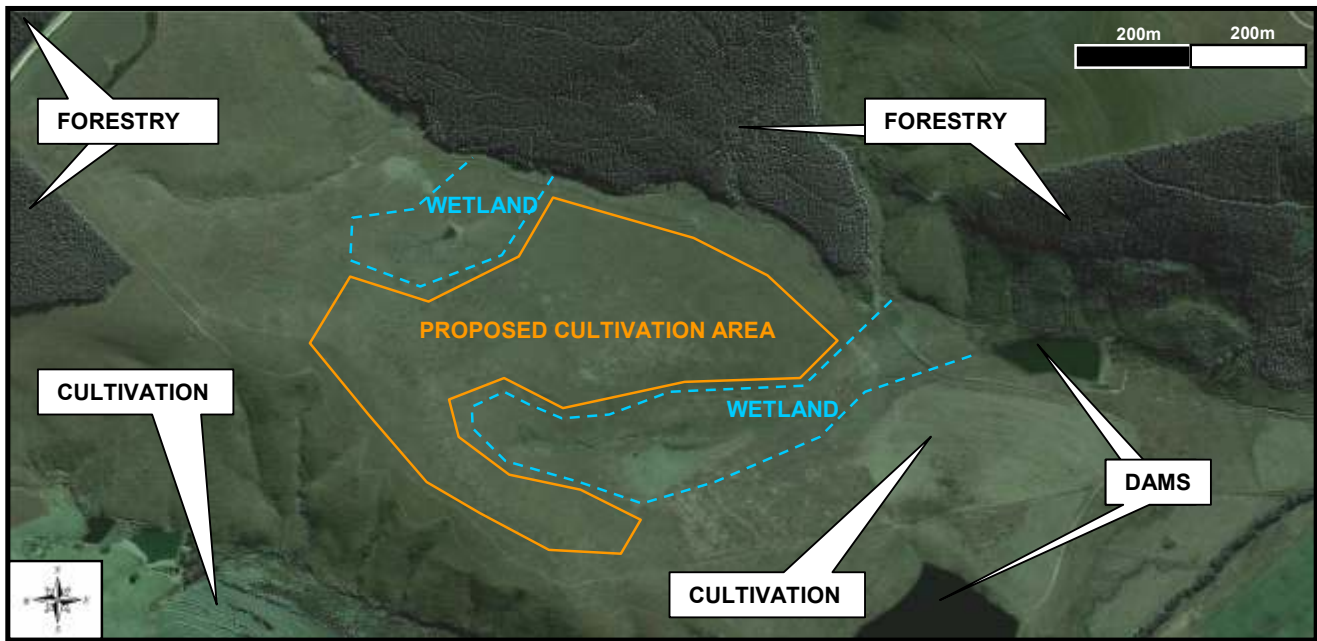
The site is situated approximately 10km north east of the town of Creighton, and approx 21 km north west of Ixopo in the southern KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. The site can be accessed as follows:

From Ixopo, take Main Road R612 towards Donnybrook / Bulwer and travel for approx 20km. At the first turn-off to Creighton, travel for a further 8.5 km towards Donnybrook, then at the second Creighton turn-off, turn right onto Main Road 8-2 S to Hella Hella. Travel along this road for approx 3km. The site is located on the right and is accessed by a farm track (see Figures 1 and 2).

**? LOCATION OF PROPERTY**



**FIGURE 1: Location of Proposed Cultivation Site near Creighton**  
(Extracted from 1:50 000 Topographical Maps 2929DD and 3029BB)



**FIGURE 2: Aerial Photo showing Proposed Cultivation Site, near Creighton**  
(Extracted from Google Earth)

**? WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS?**

In terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations promulgated in terms of the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), certain Listed Activities are specified for which either a Basic Assessment Process (GNR 544 and 546) or a Scoping and EIA Process (GNR 545) is required.

The following Listed Activity in Government Notice (GN) R 546 (Listing Notice 3) is applicable to the proposed cultivation:

- ◆ **Activity 14:** *The clearance of an area of 5 hectares or more of vegetation where 75% or more of the vegetation cover constitutes indigenous vegetation... in all areas outside urban areas.*

JEC Environmental Services (JEC) has been appointed by The Eastwolds Trust to act as the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) and conduct the necessary Basic Assessment Application Process for the proposed activity.

**? WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE BASIC ASSESSMENT PROCESS?**

The Basic Assessment Process aims to:

- ◆ Inform and involve all potential IAPs of the proposed activity;
- ◆ Identify the potential impacts (positive and negative) that the proposed activity may have on the ecological and socio-economic environment;
- ◆ Provide recommendations based on the identified impacts and conduct any necessary Specialist Studies; and
- ◆ Provide the Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (DAEA) with enough information to make an informed decision regarding the environmental authorisation of the proposed activity.



## WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS?

The following **POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS** have been identified for the proposed cultivation:

IMPACT	RESPONSE
Loss of indigenous grassland.	Vegetation Study to be done as part of the Basic Assessment Process. The Applicant is committed to conserving other areas of grassland on the farm in perpetuity as an off-set for the loss of this portion of grassland.
Loss of habitat for indigenous fauna.	Value of faunal habitat, specifically for avifauna (birds) will be assessed in the Basic Assessment Process.
Potential for nearby natural water resources to become clogged with sediment from run-off of cultivated lands.	Wetland Delineation and Functional Assessment will be conducted during the Basic Assessment Process, recommending suitable buffers to prevent / reduce this impact.
Potential for elevated nutrient levels in nearby natural water resources due to fertilisation of cultivated lands.	Wetland Functional Assessment would determine suitable buffer width to prevent / reduce this impact.

The following **POTENTIAL POSITIVE IMPACTS** have been identified for the proposed cultivation:

IMPACT	RESPONSE
Proposed cultivation of maize would mean that the farmer could milk more cows and start running his own planting equipment.	Expansion of farming operation would create more employment opportunities and ensure ongoing sustainability.
Ability for farmer to have his own feed for his cattle, as well as an alternative income stream through sale of maize.	Sustainability of farming operation would be ensured in the long-term.
Possibility for other areas of indigenous grassland to be conserved (as a condition of authorisation for the proposed cultivation).	This would protect grassland as well as habitat for endangered species, including Oribi and Blue Swallow.



## WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE BASIC ASSESSMENT PROCESS?

The Basic Assessment Process can be described as follows:

1. Submission of Application Form:

The EAP has completed the official Application Form and submitted it to the relevant DAEA office. This Application Form includes relevant maps and declarations from the EAP and Applicant. The DAEA will acknowledge receipt of the Application Form and assign the application a reference number.

2. Public Participation:

The public and relevant Authorities will be notified of the proposed development through newspaper adverts, site notices and direct consultation. This Background Information Document forms part of this stage.

3. Identification of Impacts and Alternatives

Environmental issues, concerns, development constraints and possible development alternatives will be identified using professional judgement, project information, experience of similar projects, a review of available literature, site visits, and consultation with the Applicant, authorities and the public.

4. Impact Evaluation

The significance of environmental issues will be evaluated in terms of their expected extent, intensity, duration and probability of occurrence.

5. Mitigation and Management Measures

Measures to manage and minimise impacts to within acceptable levels, as well as measures to maximise the socio-economic benefits associated with the development, will be identified and recorded in the Basic Assessment Report.

6. *Environmental Reporting*

The Draft Basic Assessment Report will be made available to all IAPs and relevant Authorities for review and comment. A Final Basic Assessment Report will be compiled including all comments received on the Draft Basic Assessment Report and submitted to the Competent Authority (DAEA) for consideration.

7. *Authority Decision*

The Final Basic Assessment Report will be used as the basis for the decision by DAEA on whether the project should be approved or not. The DAEA can refuse permission or grant permission with conditions.



**HOW CAN IAPS COMMENT ON THIS APPLICATION?**

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The need for public input and involvement is of critical importance. All IAPs (neighbours, authorities, organisations etc.) are invited to comment on the proposed development. Comments can be communicated to us by post, fax or email (contact details are provided below).

Comments are accepted by any of the above forms of communication throughout the process. Please ensure that initial comments are submitted by **26 April 2013**.

