



water affairs

Department:
Water and Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: QUESTION 808 FOR WRITTEN REPLY

A draft reply to the above-mentioned question asked by Mr P J Groenewald (FF Plus), is attached for your consideration, please.


DIRECTOR-GENERAL (Act)

DATE: 7/9/07

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DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/ AMENDED


MS B P SONJICA; MP
MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

DATE: 13/09/09

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR WRITTEN REPLY

QUESTION NO 808

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 14 AUGUST 2009
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 9)

808. Mr P J Groenewald (FF Plus) to ask the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs:†

- (1) Whether her department has been notified of the proposed construction of a mega silt dam of 1 400 ha at the Vaal River, south-east of Stilfontein in North West; if so,
- (2) whether any radiological investigation into possible pollution of the Vaal River has been undertaken; if not, why not; if so,
- (3) whether the proposed site of the silt dam is higher upstream than the point from which drinking water for Klerksdorp is pumped; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (4) whether she will reject the environmental impact study; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (5) whether she will make a statement on the matter? NW949E

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REPLY:

- (1) Yes, My Department's Regional Office: Free State has indeed been notified of the intention to establish a mega tailings facility in the area of Stilfontein. The applicant is a company called Mine Waste Solutions (MWS). This company (MWS) intends to reclaim several old tailings facilities in the Stilfontein area in order to extract gold and Uranium deposits still left in these old tailings. These old tailings facilities are currently all underlain by Dolomite geological formations. These formations are not suitable for the placement of tailings facilities due to their high permeability nature thus causing high potential for the pollution of the ground water resource. All these old tailings dams will in the end be removed, re-mined, rehabilitated and placed on the new mega tailings facility.

A comprehensive site selection process was followed by the applicant in order to identify a suitable location to establish such a facility. The general geology of the area around Stilfontein, is predominantly underlying dolomites. The focus area to establish a new mega facility was therefore identified as the only available protrusion of Karoo sediments in this area. Due to the very low permeability nature of these Karoo formations it is the logical choice. The placement and design of the new mega tailings facility was therefore carefully considered to limit the potential for water pollution to the ultimate. The Mine Waste Solutions (MWS) engaged in a comprehensive public participation process as part of their Environmental Impact Study (EIA), in order to seek the inputs of interested and affected parties. (It should be noted that the EIA process falls under the mandate of the Department of Environmental Affairs).

- (2) No radiological investigation was done by the Department. It was emphasized by the applicant that the process they will be using in reclaiming the old tailings will remove the Uranium, which is associated with radio-activity. The final product deposited on the new mega tailings facility without Uranium should not be causing radiological pollution of the Vaal River.
- (3) The proposed site of the mega tailings facility is approximately 5 km up-stream of the extraction point of Mid-Vaal Water Company that supply drinking water to the Klerksdorp, Orkney, Stilfontein and Hartbeesfontein (KOSH) area. Should best practice for the construction, design and management of the new tailings facility being followed, and if the facility is lined with an approved liner, the slimes dam should have no detrimental effect on the quality of the water in the Vaal River.
- (4) The Environmental Impact Study (EIA) process is a separate process facilitated by the Department of Environmental Affairs to authorize a listed activity in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998). The deposition of slimes on the new proposed mega tailings facility also requires a Water Use License under Section 21 of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No.36 of 1998) and an application for a Water Use License application will thus be considered by the Department (of Water Affairs). The EIA is indeed part of the supporting documentation that will serve as motivation for the Water Use License to be considered. However, My Department will follow a very stringent approach in considering this Water Use License application. My Department will ensure that best practices in the design, construction and operation of such a facility will be followed.

Due to the high probability of such tailings facility to cause water pollution, the Department will make it very clear that this mega tailings facility must be lined to ensure the maximum protection of the environment. The application for a Water Use License is currently with My Department's Regional Office: Free State for consideration. After all relevant specialists have scrutinized the application and supporting documentation, the draft license will be forwarded with a recommendation or a non-recommendation to the Chief Director: Water Use at the National Office for her approval or non approval. Only upon granting of a license can the applicant proceed with the deposition of slimes on the new mega tailings facility.

- (5) Once all the processes are in line My Department will be in a position to make a statement on the matter.