



Internet Article

Mining company gets a heavy fine for polluting a river

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Phalaborwa Regional Court in Limpopo fined Bosveld Phosphate (Pty) Ltd a total of R2,5 million for discharging hazardous waste into Ga-Selati River in 2013. R1,1 million was suspended while R1,450 fine is payable within 14 days. The company pleaded guilty to violating sections of the National Water Act and the National Environmental Management Act.

This followed a raid by the Blue Scorpions after a tip off by the public that the mining house was dumping its toxic waste into the river.

Quick intervention by the Enforcement Unit together with the Green Scorpions from the Department of Environmental Affairs ensured that immediate measures were implemented by Bosveld Phosphate to ensure risk reduction to the environment. The interventions included dredging the impoundment facilities to create extra storage capacity and a number of other activities to prevent another spillage from occurring

Head of the Blue Scorpions, the Enforcement unit at DWS, Nigel Adams, described the fine as a victory for the environment and tourism. He said he hoped that the hefty fine would serve as a deterrent to would-be offenders.

He said the Blue Scorpions would continue to raid industries who polluted South Africa's rivers with impunity. In the past year alone the unit had raided no fewer than 20 offending companies and local governments and served them with directives (notices) to stop their illegal activities. These ranged from farmers to mines and abattoirs. Repeat offenders have been charged and have fined by the courts, Adams said.

Dr Sharon Pollard of the Association for Water and Rural Development said the mines and associated industries cannot cope with the amount of effluent they produce and this represented an ongoing source of risk to the people and natural resources in the catchment.

"Our research into the resilience of the Limpopo River Basin and the Olifants Catchment in particular indicates that there have been spills every year for a long time, not just from Bosveld. At the end of the day the mines and associated industries can't cope with the amount of effluent they produce and this represents an ongoing source of risk to the people and natural resources in the catchment."

She said samples taken at 28 points along the river showed high salinity associated with mining activities and irrigated agricultural practices. There are also concerns around sulphate levels associated with acid mine drainage, phosphate levels associated with wastewater treatment and agricultural practices (phosphate fertilizers) and pH levels associated with mining and acid mine drainage.

According to Adams climate change is likely to exacerbate the strain that the system is under, with increased temperatures, evaporation, flooding and droughts. These impacts on the livelihoods of the poor and vulnerable as well as affecting agriculture and food security.

Pollard said while there were plans to move towards a zero discharge system where mines and associated industries will no longer release untreated water into the Olifants or its



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tributaries like the Ga-Selati River, this is still a long way off. Also, while mines are required to have social and environmental mitigation plans and funds in place, these seldom cover the real – or full – costs of ensuring the health of the river system.

The Ga-Selati River enters the Olifants River to the south of Phalaborwa, very close to the Kruger National Park above the Massingir Dam in Mozambique. The 2013 spill polluted the river for several kilometres, severely impacting the downstream environment

Themba Khumalo