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NEAS REFERENCE: DEA/EIA/0001556/2012

DEA REFERENCE: 14/12/16/3/3/2/441

Mokgope Consulting CC
P O Box 2363, Highlands North, 2037

Attention: Judith Fasheun
Environmental Consultant
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cc: mKabasa@environment.gov.za

RE: OBJECTION AGAINST THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE; PROPOSED ARIES-HELIOS 765KV TRANSMISSION POWER LINE AND SUBSTATIONS UPGRADE

PHS Consulting act on behalf of **Mr Basson of Leopont 340 Properties Proprietary Limited t/a Dagab Boerdery** called Leopont for the purpose of this objection. Leopont is the owner of RE/282; 2/282 and Re 283 indicated on figure 1 below.

Leopont **does not support the preferred Corridor 3**, we are of the opinion that **Corridor 1 should be preferred**. Leopont will not provide consent for a servitude dissecting their farm along the Corridor 3 route, therefore making this alternative not feasible.

BASES OF OBJECTION

- 1) Process factors.
- 2) Rational for concluding the preferred corridor.

DETAIL OBJECTION

- 1) *Process factors* –

During our investigations of the proposed Solar Reserve Kotulo Tsatsi concentrated solar facility CSP 1, CSP 2 & CSP 3 we became aware of the transmission power line upgrade that affect the above mentioned cadastral portions owned by Leopont.

Based on this we contacted Mokgope Consulting CC and requited the EIAR information that was kindly provided. We were advised that the formal public participation process was concluded but that we can still provide comment to be included in the DEA submission. Mokgope Consulting CC confirmed via e-mail that we were registered as I&AP's on the project.

It is unfortunate that we are only getting involved with this EIA at such a late stage. Our comments could have been helpful in concluding the preferred alternative. According to our records the landowner Leopont never received any formal notification of the proposed development. We kindly request that you provide us with proof of notification to Leopont 340 Properties Proprietary Limited t/a Dagab Boerderij the owners of the following farms RE/282; 2/282 and Re 283.

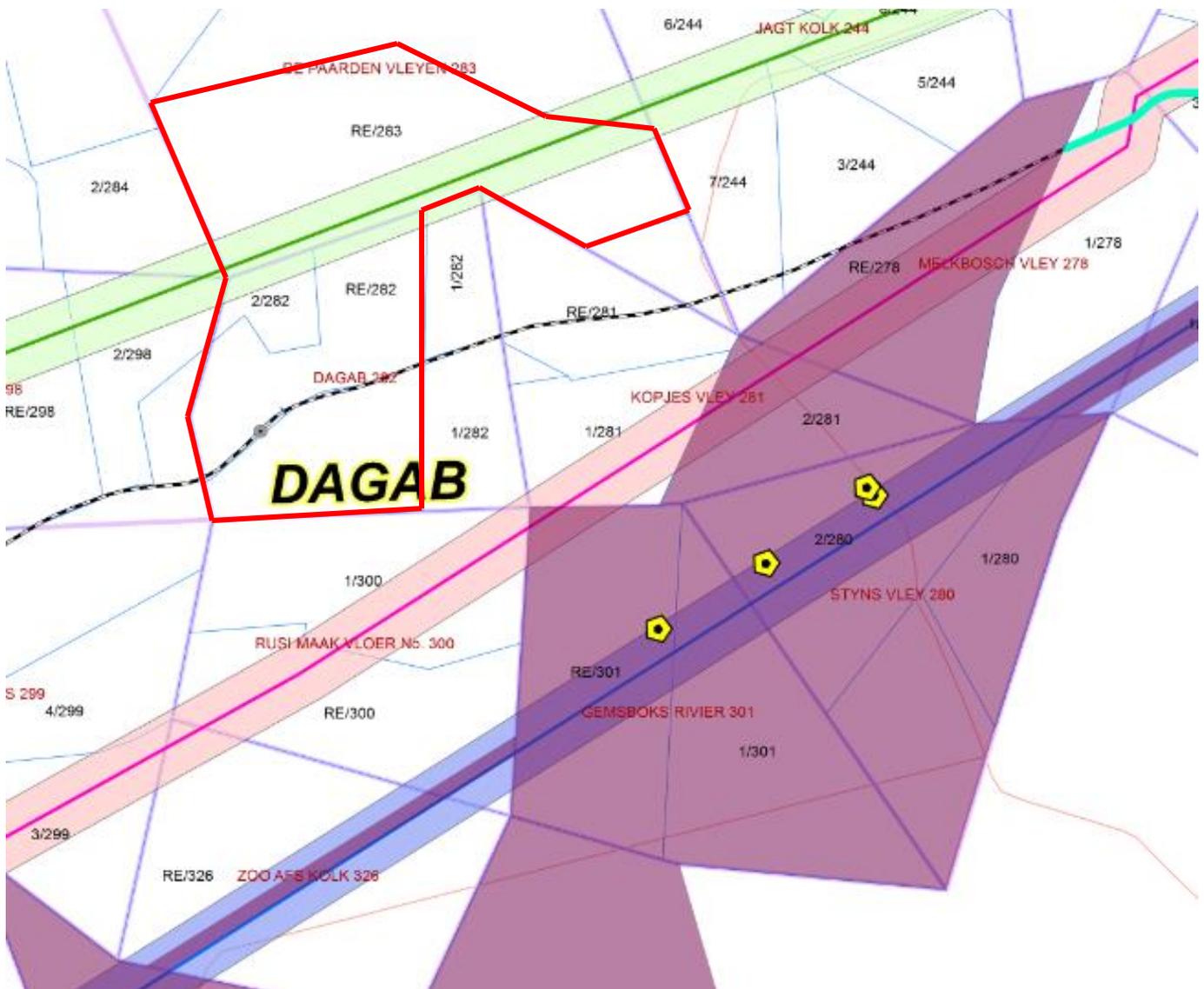


Figure 1: Mokgope Consulting CC source

If Leopont was not formally informed by registered mail we question the thoroughness of this application into the NEMA public participation requirements. Unless you provide us with proof of notification we request that a formal final round of public participation be allowed. It is highly likely that other parties might have been overlooked as well. Considering the time that has lapsed since July 2014 when the last round of public participation took place it is highly likely that new I&AP's could come forward. This relate to an 18 month period since your last consultation and circulation of the EIA. Procedurally this application should have lapsed already.

The proposed Eskom transmission corridor alternatives clashes with the recently approved CSP 3 (DEA REF: 14/16/3/3/2/694) it also clash with the CSP 1 & 2 (DEA REF: 14/16/3/3/2/694/1 & 2), EIA that is still in process. These transmission corridors also clashes with further expansions proposed on the Solar Reserve, see figure 2 below. We have questioned the legitimacy of the CSP 3, EA on cadastral portions that is currently involved in your EIA process. We propose that you alert DEA about this clash and how it could jeopardize the outcome of your application.

It would seem as if the Eskom corridor application was registered before the Solar Reserve development, therefore it is essential that the Solar Reserve EA be declared unlawful until the Eskom corridor approval has been finalized. Issuing EA's on sites where other projects of national importance are proposed seems irrational and not coordinated.

The Eskom Corridor 1 clashes with CSP 2 & 3 and CSP Trough 1. The Eskom Corridor 2 clashes with CSP 3 and CSP Trough 2. The Corridor 3 does not clash with the Solar Reserve, but it does with our expectations. This makes the Solar Farm project not feasible at this point in time. The Applicant in the Solar Reserve case indicated the current powerline but did not consider the 2 km wide corridor proposed by Eskom, neither did they consider the fact that their project is only feasible if the transmission lines are upgraded, without an upgrade the current lines can't transfer the generation.

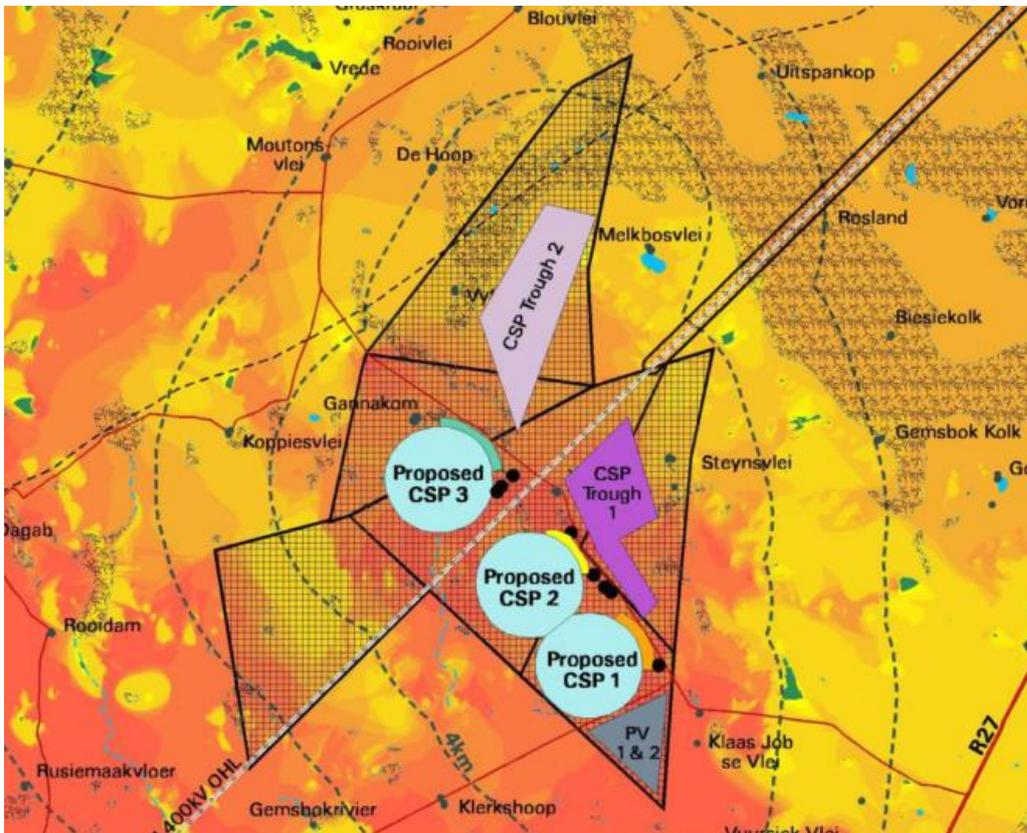


Figure 2: Seven Solar Reserve components. CSP 3 was approved and CSP 2 & 1 is in process.

2) Rational for concluding the preferred corridor -

Mokogope Consulting state that for the purposes of seeking environmental authorisation, 2km wide corridors are typically investigated in detail to determine the preferred corridor to avoid any environmental sensitive features and allow for minor deviations within the corridor during the servitude acquisition negotiation process and the power line construction along the route.

Mokogope Consulting further state that a vehicle access road is usually required to be established to allow access along the entire length of the servitude. Access is required during both the construction and operation / maintenance phases of the transmission power line life cycle. Any new access roads that are required will be established during the construction phase and are more established by vehicle passage than by grading or blading. In order to reduce potential impacts associated with the construction of new access roads, existing roads will be used as far as possible where available and new access roads will be constructed by means of driving over the vegetation where possible to avoid permanent removal of the existing vegetation. n.

Establishment of new access routes during the construction phase would need to be negotiated with the relevant landowners concerned once Environmental Authorisation has been obtained.

Mokogope Consulting further state that the proposed development could affect many aspects of the environment along the course of the activity such as: crossing fences, boreholes, farm tracks, dwellings, mines, pipelines and watercourses. And that another key determinant is of “economic factor”. The shorter and straighter (with few bends) is the route, the less expensive it is to build the proposed power line.

Based on the specialist assessment criteria in the EIAR the following were concluded:

Corridor 1 was preferred by:

1. Avifauna;
2. Visual; and
3. Ecotourist;

Corridor 2 was preferred by:

1. SKA

Corridor 3 was preferred by:

1. Vegetation; and
2. Wetland

Preferred corridor by I&AP; SKA is Corridor 2. It would appear as if there are no other I&AP preferences. But please consider our submission that corridor 3 is not supported because it dissect the Leopont property in half, it introduces a very high visual impact to the farm and an impact on the farms conservation management plans, access arrangement and overall logistics. Considering that Leopont propose Corridor 1 as preferred because it follows primarily the existing power line alignment because it reduces the resistance by landowners for servitude acquisition, development and approval of new access roads, gates and the interference with existing manmade structures like fence, pipes etc. Corridor 1 is known and accepted by the farming community ito of the current sense of place.

The EAP concluded that Corridor 3 should be the final chosen route due to its least impacts on CBAs and watercourses and provided that Corridor 3 avoids SKA solar development areas.

We oppose the rational of reaching this conclusion. The EAP clearly weighs the Bio-physical environment more than the socio and economic factors. We need to remind the reader that the tree legs of an EIA relate to Environment, Social and Economic factors and that all three need to be weighed equally. In an equal scenario more specialists has opted for Corridor 1 than Corridor 3. The sequence if weighed equally should have been; preferred Corridor 1, then Corridor 3 and then Corridor 2.

In order to determine if the Vegetation and Wetland preference to Corridor 3 relate to significance and a much higher magnitude of the impacts, hereby our take on the information available in the EIAR.

As per vegetation specialist *“The proposed power line corridors will impact on **much of the same broad vegetation communities. In addition, all three corridors provide habitat for species of conservation concern** as well as provincially protected species. The vegetation and ecological features with the highest sensitivities are pans, riparian areas, moist grassland and rocky areas and ridges, as well as Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) and Ecological Support Areas (ESAs). Therefore, the corridor traversing the least vegetation of high sensitivity and no areas classified as CBAs and the least ESAs should **theoretically** be the preferred corridor.”*

Further to this the vegetation specialist concluded as follow: *“The corridor alternatives **did not differ much as to their sensitivity towards the proposed power line development.** However, Corridor 3 was determined as preferred corridor. This corridor does not cross or impact a CBA.*

*The power line development and substation expansions are **not expected to have a large or significantly detrimental impact on vegetation**, provided that sensitive vegetation is avoided or impacts thereon limited.*"

The vegetation specialist only used the CBA occurrences as reasons for Corridor 3 to be preferred. But in figure 22 of the EIAR a CBA also occurs along Corridor 3. The highlighted words in the above paragraph clearly indicate to us that there is very little to distinguish between the 3 corridors with limited significance difference and that mitigation can be applied to all. This assessment refrain from acknowledging that Corridor 1 was subject to historic disturbance when the existing line was constructed and operated and it did not consider the new roads associated with a new corridor. Based on this we reject the preference to Corridor 3 and argue that the impact will be the least for Corridor 1 because it was impacted on previously and all other associated support infrastructure (servitude, roads, gates etc) is already in place to accommodate an additional line. Overall we are of the opinion that less disturbance will occur if construction takes place along an already developed route.

With regards to the Wetland Assessment, the criteria for preference relate to the total number of watercourses involved in a corridor alignment. Corridor 3 outweighs the others but the specialist did not consider the fact that Corridor 1 has already caused impact in the identified watercourses due to the existing power line. The assessment does little ground truthing and limited differentiation into of the magnitude of impacts between the 3 options. In this case all three options can be mitigated.

The specialist who prefers Corridor 1 (same as Leopont) Avifauna; Visual; and Ecotourist based their preference on significant factors and field survey results.

The Avifaunal specialist is much more assertive in conclusion: *"Corridor 1 is the preferred, and really the only viable route from an avifaunal perspective. This is because the line can be placed adjacent to an existing line for its entire route, an option not possible with the other alternatives. All other factors are similar between routes; although Corridor 3 is close to fewer wetlands than the others, there are still a considerable number of these features in close proximity. It is strongly recommended that the option of upgrading or recycling this existing 400 kV line be fully examined first. Failing that option, the power line must be built adjacent to existing lines. This is essential to restrict the number of power line corridors in this area and to provide mitigation for bird collision (in addition to the line marking recommended)."* It echo's our point of following an existing line of disturbance and the Avifaunal case should weigh more.

The visual specialist also has a more accretive significance conclusion: *"Transmission line and transmission servitude is considered to cause the least impact on the landscape character due to the reduced sensitivity of the landscape along the roads and servitudes. The impact of Corridor 1 on visual receptors varies between residents, tourists and motorists. Corridor 1's great advantage lies in the less significant visual impact on tourists and residents as compared to the other alternatives. The public association with transmission lines and major public roads is a common perception which makes the co-existence of these two features more acceptable."* We support this recommendation.

Ecotourism recommendation relate to: *"Corridor 1 is considered the most preferred alternative from an ecotourism perspective. Corridor 1 follows existing transmission line and transmission servitude and therefore will not create an additional visual impact during operation phase. All ecotourism products will be adapted to this impact already. Corridor 2 and 3 will have an impact on the visual character of the area for tourists passing through the region. It should be noted that people travelling through this area will be looking for photographic opportunities and possibilities. Other than that, there are no major tourism products in this area to take into consideration. The ecotourist therefore recommends that the project proceed on condition that Corridor 1 is selected as the preferred alternative and developed accordingly. Should the mitigation measures be implemented as discussed, there is no reason why this project cannot proceed. No fatal flaws*

from an ecotourism point of view were identified.” Again this specialist opinion referred to the existing line of disturbance and the importance of following the existing corridor.

From the above it is clear that the wetlands & vegetation assessment selected Corridor 3 based on the number of CBA's only and not the significance of actual vegetation and wetland impacts. Both neglected to recognise the existing power line, access routes and past disturbances. All the other specialist who selected Corridor 1 refers to actual site observations and concurred that it is essential to select Corridor 1. Avifaunal impacts are much more calculated and the recommendation is essential ito of the current functioning ecosystem.

If one ad the “economic factor” mentioned ito the least amount of bends, it is clear from the complete map provided that Corridor 1 has 3 bends; Corridor 2 has 5 bends and Corridor 3 has 4 bends. We did not count the area where all three alternatives follow the same route. In this case Corridor 1 should be preferred.

SKA has planned their reserve area knowing that Corridor 1 exist, therefore they should see this as a planning fix and not a constraint.

We are of the opinion that not only does the number of specialist selecting Corridor 1 outnumber the others but it also outweighs all the other alternatives ito significance of impacts. There is no scientific reason why a CBA should result in outweighing a Corridor with more specialists are selecting it. If the tree legs of the EIA process are considered then Corridor 1 should be preferred.

Please confirm receipt of this comment and that you will provide it to DEA as part of your submission.

We trust that you will find this in order.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Slabbert', written in a cursive style.

PAUL SLABBERT