

## PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RADISSON BLU SAFARI RESORT

### **Draft Minutes of FOCUS GROUP MEETING WITH INTERESTED AND AFFECTED PARTIES**

**Date:** 3 May 2011

**Time:** 16h30

**Venue:** SANParks Pretoria Head Office Boardroom

#### **In Attendance:**

<b>Project Team</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>Environmental Consultants:</b>	
Karen Botes (KB)	Interdesign Landscape Architects (ILA) - Managing Director
Claudia Coetzee (CC)	ILA – Environmental Manager
Shalini Chetty (SC)	ILA – Environmental Assessment Practitioner
<b>SANParks:</b>	
Giju Varghese (GV)	Head Business Development
Glenn Phillips (GP)	Managing Executive of Tourism and Marketing
Professor Willem van Riet (WvR)	Projects Communications Co-coordinator
<b>Interested and Affected Parties</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Elise Templehoff (ET)	Beeld Newspaper
A N Fernsby (NF)	Private
Gerhard Smit (GS)	Private
Andre Botha (AB)	Endangered Wildlife Trust Manager: Birds of Prey Programme
Friedemann Essrich (FE)	Private
Jackie van der Merwe (JvdM)	Private

#### **Welcome and Introduction**

Ms. Karen Botes (KB) from Interdesign Landscape Architects (ILA) Pty Ltd, the Environmental Assessment Practitioners, introduced herself and welcomed everyone present. KB stated that Malelane Safari Resort Investments (Pty) Ltd is the Applicant and SANParks is the Landowner for the proposed development of the Radisson Blu Safari Resort. Mr Giju Varghese (Head Business Development) (GV), Mr. Glen Phillips (Managing Executive Tourism & Marketing) (GP), and Professor Willem van Riet (Projects Communications Co-ordinator) (WvR) were introduced.

KB stated that the purpose of the meeting was:

- To present and discuss the findings of the draft Scoping Report;
- To provide affected parties with information regarding the proposed project and the preliminary findings of the EIA process;
- To provide an opportunity for comments and issues; and
- To outline the way forward To outline the way forward

A Power Point presentation was presented by KB and Claudia Coetzee (CC), providing information on the project scope and studies to be included in the EIA Report as well as on the SANParks Strategic Decision. A copy of this presentation is available on ILA's website at [www.ilaweb.co.za](http://www.ilaweb.co.za)

Professor Willem van Riet (WvR) has been commissioned by the SANParks as a Projects Communications Coordinator. WvR explained that he will also review processes relating to the proposed development and provide input and guidance on whether the development could proceed with minimal impacts on the biophysical and socio-economic environment. WvR presented an overview of the Kruger National Park (KNP) which included GIS information such as site sensitivity based on Park Biodiversity Plans, threats facing the KNP in terms of land claims and adjacent land use, expansion plans and KNP zonations. A copy of the presentation is available on the ILA website at [www.ilaweb.co.za](http://www.ilaweb.co.za)

KB thereafter facilitated a question and answer session.

**The following comments were captured during the Question and Answer Session which followed. It should be noted that statements and questions which were made during this session that fall outside of the Scope of the EIA Process for the Radisson Blu Safari Resort have been omitted – most of these are however contained in Appendix A. Also as certain comments were of a similar nature, duplications have not been included as the purpose of these Minutes is to reflect the main concerns by the attendees pertaining to the proposed Radisson Blu Safari Resort.**

<b>Commentators</b>	<b>Comments</b>
GS	Refer to <b>Appendix A</b> for full copy of comment prepared by GS. The following questions were raised by GS as per <b>Appendix A</b>  Why is access at the Malelane Gate 24 hours?
CC	As the proposed development will function as a Hotel, 24 hour access and reception is required. A Park & Ride facility is proposed at the Malelane Gate with welcoming centre that will serve as 24 hour reception area for guests to the Radisson Blu Resort only.
GS	Will there be a no noise rule for late in the evening? GS is concerned about noise associated with the development proposal.
GP	Noise management measures will be put in place, however as the hotel will host functions a time restriction may not be appropriate. Mitigation measures will be included in the Environmental Management Plan.
GS	Should there be a requirement for luxury accommodation, at max the camps are utilized at 80% - why not convert a certain number of existing units to whatever the consulted persons in the surveys required?
GP	Research indicated a demand in the market for the product. Luxury accommodation is available already in the park e.g. existing bushveld lodges, but not offering the product as proposed by the Safari Resort which focuses on a conference facility with accommodation provided. Wildlife experience is not the main focus of the product, but secondary.
GS	Should visitors arrive at the Malelane Gate after dark, they will have to be collected and driven to the hotel – this means traffic, noise, lights, dust when the animals are also taking a rest. This is a disturbance which they are not used to.
KB	Mitigation for this will be prepared and informed by specialist studies and will be included in the EMP.
GS	Access roads S114, S121 and S 25 to the site are currently graveled - will they remain gravel or will they be tarred? Certain roads closed during heavy rains and flooding.
CC	This information will be included in the EIA Report as per the proposal by the Civil Engineers. I speak under correction but to my knowledge the existing access road will be upgraded with

	bitumen and cement.
GS	Noise and dust will be significant during site preparation and construction phase.
GS	As per the park zonation and biodiversity sensitivity value rating 2006 the proposed hotel is indicated as in a primitive zone. The intended Safari Resort will surely be a High Intensity Camp. The 2006 area also rated as being high biodiversity value by Conservation Services. Have these zonations and ratings now been amended or are they just being ignored? If they have been amended why? Was there any other reason than just because of the need for a hotel? What has changed since 2006 and 2011?
WvR	My observation is the proposed site is within a disturbed area, within the road buffer zone which extends to about 1 km on either side of a road within the park.
CC	Motivation for specific placement of lines on sensitivity maps must be provided by the technical staff of KNP Conservation Department. The lines are not that rigid but this question should be addressed to KNP Conservation.
GS	A Draft Zonation is circulating showing the area as being rezoned to High Intensity Leisure. The Biodiversity Sensitivity Value has not changed.
CC	On the Draft Conservation Development Framework zonation indicated the area is indicated as High Intensity Leisure.
GS	Tourism demand is rumoured as being the driver for re-zoning this Highly Sensitive area for High Intensity Leisure. If this is the case where is the study proving this tourism demand? This is a worrying trend that erodes at the foundation of conservation.
CC	A document with SANParks market research was made available as a news item on the SANParks website 3 May.
GS	Enquired whether there will be another focus group meeting in order to discuss the EIA Report.
CC & KB	GS can review the report and provide ILA with his comments. ILA will assess whether a meeting will be required after obtaining inputs by DEA on the report.
GS	Requests another meeting.
GS	Will gardens be allowed?
KB & WvR	No. Specifications relating to the gardens will be included in the Environmental Management Plan (EMP).
GP	No. The development management plan will indicate no gardens are allowed.
GS	Why was only one legal notice placed in the Sunday Times?
CC & KB	Public participation was carried out according to the requirements of DEA. Notice boards were placed within the park over the 2010 December holidays as well as a legal advert was placed in a national newspaper.
GS	SANParks did the bare minimum in terms of public participation, placing one advert was not adequate.
CC Andre Botha (AB)	Interested and Affected Parties can register throughout the EIA Process. Our database is growing and all parties included on the database will be notified of the availability of the Draft EIA Report Requested copies of the slideshows.
KB	ILA will upload them onto their website for download.
CC	All mitigation measures are in the process of being considered depending on the outcome of specialist reports. ILA will compile an EMP as part of the Draft EIA Report and once finalized it will be sent I&AP's for review and comment

NF	Will no private transport be allowed?
GP	Guests to the hotel will be required to make use of the Park & Ride system. No private vehicles may be used by guests of the development.
FE	Has no personal or commercial benefits from the project, but objects to it on a fundamental basis. Stated he felt ILA should have placed an additional advert after the December holiday period.
CC	The public process was discussed with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA).
FE	Enquired why the DEA would allow an advertisement over the December holiday. Mr Essrich quoted an email correspondence which included an extract of the EIA Regulations as follows; "Unless justified by exceptional circumstances, as agreed to by the competent authority, the applicant and EAP managing the environmental assessment process must refrain from conducting any public participation process during the period of 15 December to 2 January"
CC	Indicated that the public process had been discussed with DEA and placement of the advertisement and site notice board over the December period had been approved by DEA as the KNP is a holiday destination.
GP	Stated that there are two processes to advertise. The tender was advertised as well as the EIA application.
ET	Why was the tender advertised prior to the EIA application?
CC	Only a strategic decision is in place by SANParks. The proposed development still requires environmental authorization by the DEA. The development can not continue if environmental authorization is not granted by DEA.
GP	Tenders run in a sequence, so as to ensure that all costs and risks associated with the proposed development is carried over to the developer. In this instance all the costs associated with implementation of development, specialist studies and the EIA are carried by the developer. The agreement with the developer is also that the EIA is conducted at the risk of the developer and that the final decision on whether project may proceed is dependant on whether environmental authorization is granted and any associated conditions.
GV	SANParks conducted eco tourism research and the concept was approved by cabinet. Only once the site is determined then only are site specific EIA's conducted
FE CC	What happens to objections to the development which are based on fundamental issues? ILA does not make a decision on the application, DEA that will issue a decision. All comments, including the minutes of this meeting, will be included in the Final EIA Report submitted, on which the DEA must make a decision whether the development should be allowed to go ahead and if so under what conditions.
KB	ILA is independent in this process.
NF	The proposed development highlights SANParks incompetence.
WVR	Does not believe that SANParks has any devious intention to mismanage its parks.
FE	If you look at what the world has lost and what has been preserved since the inception of environmental law, it is dismal, EIA's do not work. States the proposed site is already compromised. It can not be argued that the site is already disturbed.
KB	Stated that the process is dynamic and that everything changes in time.
AB	Stated that he understands SANParks experience the lack of government support, therefore should the proposed development go ahead, it should be done with the least amount of impacts on the environment.
AB	Also stated that there are many issues regarding SANParks that I&AP's have, however this meeting is not the platform within which to address other concerns but rather attention should be given to the current EIA process that is underway. Also enquired about how many similar developments would be required in order for SANParks to have sufficient funds to manage and maintain their parks.
GP	SANParks has three key markets which bring in their bulk income 1). The current South African market consisting mainly of whites; 2). The international market consisting of the UK, France, Germany, Netherlands and the USA; and 3). Emerging market which is focused on Black South Africans. SANParks has also embarked upon initiatives to focus on obtaining the interest of Black South

	Africans to visit the park. Past market research and tourism research is in process of being reviewed in order to determine what future operations/ development may be required for all the Parks to be sustainable into the future. Each Park Plan is reviewed and amended every 5 years to ensure sustainability.
GP	Stated that SANParks wants to make an example of the proposed project, to show that development can be done responsibly.
AB	Were any alternative sites considered?
CC	Five sites were identified originally. These are being considered as part of the EIA Process.
WVR	Any sites selected further west from the proposed site would have encroached into the sensitive zone.
FE	Quoted the listed activities from the Draft Scoping Report for which authorization is sought, and stated that, according to the report, the adverse impacts listed were at a total number of 38 compared to the beneficial impacts at 7. How can such an application be allowed in a National Park?
KB	The DEA is responsible for a decision of the project based on the findings of the EIA.
GP	Since the commencement of the EIA process, the EIA has revealed certain information about the site e.g. the presence of the endangered Swazi Lilies. The park was not aware of the presence of this lilies in this area but now has the information available as a result of the EIA. The EIA will propose mitigation to provide protection for this specie, which in turn results in conservation of biodiversity. If EIA concludes that site is not suitable, the site will be discarded.
ET	The situation does not promote biodiversity.
NF	SANParks does not have a good legal record
JVDM	What is the percentage split between the English and Afrikaans?
GP	38% English and 53% Afrikaans.
KB	Thanked everyone for attending and confirmed that the Draft Minutes would be distributed for comment prior to being finalised.

## Way Forward

KB discussed the way forward as per the slide show presentation.

KB further explained that the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment report will be available for public review.

KB thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**COMMENT PREPARED BY MR. GERHARD SMIT**