



## **STAKEHOLDERS APPRECIATES THE PROGRESS MADE IN RESOLVING THE ISSUE OF THE ST. LUCIA ESTUARINE SYSTEM**



The recent St. Lucia Estuarine stakeholders meeting held in St Lucia town was engulfed with a positive mood when the stakeholders learned of the progress made by iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority in trying to resolve the issues of the St. Lucia estuarine system. These meetings are a platform for all stakeholders to sit around the table and engage with a common purpose in mind. Meetings are convened by the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and scheduled to sit quarterly with provisions to hold special meetings in between should the need arise. The recent April meeting was described by many attendees as a step towards the right direction after receiving the report on the progress made thus far. Communities and affected parties also acknowledge iSimangaliso for involving them and giving them a chance to participate in resolving this complex matter.

In this meeting, the CEO of iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority Mr Sibusiso Bukhosini reported on the promises he made in the previous meeting. Mr Bukhosini had promised to appoint an Ecologist and introduce him to the stakeholder meetings.

As promised, the Ecologist was appointed and introduced to the meeting. He also introduced the service provider who will be reviewing the estuarine management plan and introduced the new iSimangaliso Board to stakeholders. Mr Bukhosini also explained that with these meetings, iSimangaliso is trying to correct the perception people have about government departments not working together in resolving this matter. iSimangaliso find it vital to have such meetings with relevant government sectors, rural community representatives, fishers, famers, business owners and various stakeholders to demonstrate the agreements made in dealing with this matter, outline work that will be done, timeframes and anticipated outcomes of those actions done by different government sectors to ensure this issue is resolved.



Communities and the affected parties believe that with the implemented activities, it shows that iSimangaliso is trying its level best to resolve the issues regarding the St. Lucia Estuarine system, and they hope the issue of the estuary system will be resolved soon. They requested that since the processes has come this far, they do not want anything that will stop or delay it.

Mr Reddy representing Rate Payers and Mr Mzonjani Gumede representing Dukuduku community said they are overwhelmed by the progress made thus far regarding the St. Lucia Estuarine system and the flooding of farms. Reminiscing about the past, they recall that people used to come to the St Lucia lake to fish and others used to feed their families from the produce harvested from the farms that are currently inundated with water. For the fact that there is such progress regarding the issue of the estuarine, they hope by the end of 3 months, this issue would have been

resolved because once the raining season comes again, the situation will be uncontrollable.

The iSimangaliso Ecologist, Dr Riaan Cedras delivering his presentation stated that there are 2 Environmental Management Acts options that can be used where one could apply for either Section 30 which deals with incidents and Section 30A which deals with emergency situations, according to Dr Cedras, the term is defined in subsection (1) of Section 30 of NEMA as "an unexpected, sudden, and uncontrolled release of a hazardous substance," which can result from things like a major emission, fire, or explosion, and which has already caused or may cause significant harm to the environment, human life, or property. Whereas Section 30A of NEMA defines a situation that has arisen unexpectedly and poses an imminent and serious threat to the environment, human life, or property, including Act 57 of 2002, but excluding an incident envisaged under section 30 of NEMA.

Dr Riaan Cedras explained that iSimangaliso notified the department (DFFE) of the above events and associated effects and requested to undertake the following activities:

1. Excavation of a channel to a base level of 0msl (mean sea level) with a base width of 7.5m and side slopes of 1 in 1 (gradient) to drain down the back flooded waters within a reasonable time.
2. The most suitable excavation method is the excavation of the beach channel (1.2 km in length) using excavators and amphibious dredger and the lower Msunduzi river (2.3km) blockage using a specialized multi-purposed dredger called an amphibious dredger with a cutter and suction head.
3. The clearance of a beach channel and the lower Msunduzi using the combined methods of an excavator and the specialized multi-purpose machinery would take a minimum timeframe of 6.5 months to be completed as of the date of the Umfolozi Sugar Planters proposal dated October 2022.
4. The intention of the farmers however is for the project implementation to allow them to be ready to replant in September 2023 this means if the timeframe of 6.5 months provided by the farmers is considered, this intervention needs to commence immediately or as soon as possible.

Dr Cedras also reported that the outcome of the NEMA 30A legislation application was further denied on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2023 on the basis of the following:

1. The proposed measures will require the procurement of equipment, specifically the specialized amphibious dredge. Details on its availability were not available at the time of receipt of the Section 30A directive request and it is envisaged that approvals for procurement will be required and will further delay the implementation of proposed interventions and actions.
2. On Site surveys of the subject area are required to be able to identify and assess potential impacts and this will be finalized once the appropriate engineering team has been appointed and is on site to

conduct the necessary assessments and provide technical details of how the proposed work will be undertaken. As no clear timelines are available at this point in time, the appointment of the team and specialist may cause further delays with the implementation of the said activities.

3. The 26 250sqm vegetation which is proposed to be cleared within the critical biodiversity area and the 86 300cm<sup>3</sup> of the sediment to be removed are estimates. No information has been provided indicating the proposed mitigation for the impact associated with the proposed intervention, the method to be used for the removal of sediments from site or where the sediments will be disposed of. The impact of this on the system, system functionality, and overall impact on the surrounding environment has not been established. This is regarded as fundamental information required before a directive in terms of section 30A can be favourably considered.

Dr Riaan also stated that the solutions to mitigate the impact on the environment to maintain the environmental integrity of lake St Lucia estuarine system, in terms of forecast, and the monitoring of suspended sediment yields into the St Lucia estuary system. This will assist iSimangaliso to do the monitoring and management of the dredging process which will enable iSimangaliso to take timely decisions and implement adaptive and corrective measures for the maintenance of a free-flow river channel.

Following the refusal of the Section 30A, the next approach is to conduct a Basic Assessment and the public participation process, which must be carried out and concluded within next three months. iSimangaliso must appoint the specialist who will work with the appointed Environmental Consultants in delivering at least 4 assessments being the Geotechnical/Engineer to assess the hydraulic performance and the ecological circumstance in the catchment system, Sedimentologist to study the constituents, textures, structures, and content of the deposits in order to identify the best approach to dredging and mitigating post-dredging impacts, the Vegetation/wetland specialist to document how removing excess sediment and alien vegetation impacted hydrology and plant assemblages both prior and post excavation, the Social-ecologist must be included to assess the impact and adverse effects on the social users and include the Marine biologist who will assess the abundance, diversity and biomass of key marine taxa in relation to environmental parameters.

The St Lucia estuary stakeholder meetings are held quarterly and attended by various stakeholders. The next meeting is set to be held in June 2023.

End

**Statement issued by iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority**

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