

MINING SECTOR STRENGTHENS Environmental Management

Over the course of the past year mining companies in Namibia, under the auspices of the Chamber of Mines, have taken significant steps to strengthen their collective environmental commitment and to promote the sustainability of the sector. In June 2017 the Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE) and the Chamber of Mines (CoM) organized a workshop, bringing together the Environment Departments of all mining companies.

This was the first occasion where environmental scientists from the mining sector came together to share best practice, to exchange ideas and to jointly develop a three-year environmental strategy for the sector. In September, the Council of the Chamber of Mines, comprising the MDs and CEOs of the mining companies, unanimously adopted the environmental strategy.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY FOR THE MINING SECTOR INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING KEY FOCAL AREAS:

Establishment of an environmental subcommittee of the Chamber of Mines, to meet annually on a rotational basis, to review the progress made in implementing the strategy, and to guide its future direction.



Strengthen the links and collaboration with government, including with the Office of the Environmental Commissioner to help standardize, streamline and strengthen environmental management and reporting procedures.

Promote and support the establishment of a properly managed hazardous waste management site in Namibia. Namibia currently has no hazardous waste site. The need for such a facility cuts across all sectors, including for the disposal of domestic products such as batteries.

Strengthen public relations and engagement, and make all aspects of mining accessible to public scrutiny. The mining sector is the only sector that habitually employs professionally trained environmental officers, who closely monitor and manage a wide range of environmental parameters. In the past, mining was often poorly regulated and environmentally damaging. With Environmental Assessments, Environmental Management Plans, public pressure and international companies aiming for high environmental and social standards, the industry has changed dramatically over the past few decades.

Develop a comprehensive Best Practice Guide for Environmental Management in the mining sector. This will be a Namibian specific handbook with Namibian case studies to showcase best practice (as well as bad examples to avoid) and help the Namibian mining industry achieve and maintain best international practice.

The environmental footprint of mining operations is strictly controlled, environmental impacts are contained and the net benefit from well-managed and regulated mining now generally far exceeds the environmental costs. The more transparent mining companies are, the greater the confidence the public will have in them.

This will be a joint publication by the NCE and CoM on behalf of industry. This work has started, and we should have a first draft by August.

Integrate mine closure, rehabilitation and funding thereof into all phases of the mine life cycle. This means that rehabilitation must be planned from the start of mining and, where possible, should be ongoing through the life of the mine.



Establish a "sustainable development" offset system for the mining sector. The Council of the Chamber of Mines is considering the establishment of a joint fund to invest in sustainable development in Namibia, covering both environmental and socio-economic projects that are aligned with the objectives of Namibia's development priorities as set out in the Harambee Prosperity Plan, NDP5 and Vision2030.

The focus of this support will be in non-mining regions of the country which have received less support to date from the sector than have the mining areas. The first two projects are (a) development of plots in Oshakati to facilitate low-income housing, working with the local town council, and (b) the distribution of power to about 900 homesteads in the Zambezi region.

More details can be found at http://www.the-eis.com/searchresults.php?action=mining_symposium, where the presentations at the workshop, the environmental strategy and other materials can be viewed and downloaded.

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