



For immediate release

Frack Free Namibia

Windhoek, Namibia

October 5, 2021

Note to editors: The Namibian NGO Frack Free Namibia (FFN) was established in 2020 with a mission to oppose oil and gas exploration within the geological limits of the Okavango Basin and collaborate on local solutions aimed at socio-economic and environmental justice for Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Namibia.

Due to ongoing security and legal threats and intimidation against community members, journalists and researchers, the authors, researchers and interviewed community members have chosen to remain anonymous. Further information can be obtained from Frack Free Namibia.

ReconAfrica's Seismic "Thumper" Survey Levels Wilderness and Damages Homes in Kavango East

"We are guided by the EMP. We are also guided by the EIA and it is so stringent, so strict that the regulators will never allow you to move outside what the law requires of you." Ndapewoshali Shapwanale, Spokesperson for ReconAfrica

Frack Free Namibia strongly condemns Canadian oil and gas company ReconAfrica's destructive and unlawful seismic acquisition activities and deviations from its original Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC).

The company is in clear violation of its 2D seismic survey Environmental Clearance Certificate, issued on 2 July 2021, which must be revoked immediately by the Namibian Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) before more irreparable damage is done to the property of Kavango residents, community conservancies and forests and natural resources by the foreign oil and gas company.

ReconAfrica's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Environmental Management Plan (EMP) promised Kavango and San communities as well as the Namibian government that *“no new cutlines shall be made, and all survey lines must follow the existing roads, tracks or paths or already disturbed areas that will require minimum vegetation clearing.* Cutlines for seismic acquisition surveys are wide strips cut through well preserved wilderness (along lines of interest to the oil exploration companies) to move seismic survey trucks and equipment.

ReconAfrica's 2D seismic surveying uses a large truck to repeatedly thump extremely heavy, accelerated weights on the ground. The thumping creates the energy necessary to record sound waves, which are then processed into subsurface images for oil and gas exploration.

Photo of a ReconAfrica-operated Explorer 860 accelerated weight drop seismic source “Thumper” truck in the Kavago (one of three being used for their survey)



Source: Frack Free Namibia

Community members forced to sign documents without explanation after seismic survey

Residents have reported that the thumping has already caused cracks and permanent structural damage to homes. The EMP says a buffer zone of 500 meters to one kilometer should be established along the survey lines away from schools, clinics or sensitive infrastructure.

The company has violated the ECC by thumping within 30 meters of peoples' homes and fields and cutting new roads without free prior informed consent. Affected community members say that they were made to sign documents without any explanation and no copies were provided to them. These documents were signed after ReconAfrica's work was already completed.

Photo of damaged homestead in the background and thumper truck tracks in foreground



Source: Frack Free Namibia

A clear violation of ReconAfrica's ECC has been reported near Cumagcashi village in the George Mukoya conservancy located 150km east of Rundu. A stretch of 2.5 km of new road was cut on virgin territory within the conservancy boundaries before its conservancy manager stopped further bush and tree clearance. This was done without prior consultation or consent by affected community conservancy and forest representatives.

Photo of new road for seismic surveying in Kavango East



Source: Frack Free Namibia

After the seismic survey was stopped at the George Mukoya conservancy, someone known to be working with ReconAfrica sent a text message offering to sponsor uniforms for conservancy resource monitors and to brief the conservancy management committee after the work and damage had already been done.

A conservancy representative said: "*They are trying to provide uniforms to the conservancy management committee to keep them quiet, because they know they entered the conservancy to do the survey without written permission from the conservancy management committee.*"

Similar reports were received from another conservancy in Kavango East where new roads were also cut without prior consultation or permission.

ECC violated immediately after being issued

Shortly after the ECC was issued to ReconAfrica, the company announced plans to carve 22.5 kilometers of new seismic “cutlines” ([or 5% of their 450 km long 2D seismic survey](#)) through virgin Kavango forest. This contradicts ReconAfrica’s EIA which stated, *“No new cutlines shall be made, and all survey lines must follow the existing roads, tracks or paths or already disturbed areas that will require minimum vegetation clearing.”* Moreover, one of the conditions of the ECC stipulates that the project is restricted to existing tracks.

Oil and gas exploration companies carry out seismic surveys to determine where best to drill stratigraphic and exploration wells. Seismic surveying usually precedes stratigraphic drilling; however, ReconAfrica decided to drill first and shoot seismic second.

On September 15, 2021, ReconAfrica executive team director Dr. James Granath stated at the Africa E&G Conference that, *“Again, 450 kilometers [of 2D seismic acquisition] are permitted. But more is going to be done. I think there's a plan and it's in the process of being permitted. And they've [the Namibian government] asked us [ReconAfrica] actually to cut some firebreaks that they've given us permission to shoot seismic data along.”*

The bulldozing of “firebreaks” is a clear violation of ReconAfrica’s Environmental Clearance Certificate and enables the company to avoid adhering to Namibia’s strict environmental protection laws. Any such forest or bush clearing by the company violates its ECC and must trigger the Namibian Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism to immediately stop ReconAfrica’s seismic survey operations until a new, comprehensive and transparent Environmental Impact Assessment can be completed.

Seismic Survey Flawed From Inception

Geologists on our team believe that ReconAfrica's weight drop seismic acquisition survey is poorly designed for the Kavango regions’ geology and will fail to provide the necessary seismic resolution needed for legitimate oil and gas exploration. For ReconAfrica, this is not surprising because experienced exploration companies would have applied to conduct seismic surveys along existing roads in the Kavango regions *before* drilling stratigraphic wells.

The long delays in ReconAfrica’s processing of their already acquired 2D seismic data (ReconAfrica CEO Scot Evans stated that 50% of the survey has been completed) also indicates that the company is experiencing severe data quality and noise problems with the survey. ReconAfrica’s recent switch from shooting 400-fold to 200-fold data along their survey lines implies poor quality data acquisition. Dr. Granath confirmed this in his Africa E&G Conference presentation when he said: *“We are having noise problems.”*

More importantly, the sudden changes to ReconAfrica's seismic survey design requires the company to detour from existing roads and carve new seismic "firebreaks" through the Kavango.

Just as the company promoted hydraulic fracturing (fracking) to investors before changing their PR strategy to "conventionals only" overnight to sidestep public outrage, ReconAfrica is now acquiring their 2D seismic away from existing roads under the deceitful guise of assisting the government to bulldoze "firebreaks."

ReconAfrica's Seismic Survey ECC Must Be Rescinded Immediately

Allowing ReconAfrica to cut firebreaks in addition to what was initially approved, sets a dangerous precedent of secretly amending ECCs after completion of the public participation process. Environmental protections are enshrined in Namibia's constitution and our nation is recognized worldwide for progressive environmental legislation and regulations. Amendments to the ECC in response to the demand of a foreign junior oil and gas company undermines Namibia's environmental governance principles and democratic processes. Frack Free Namibia calls for the withdrawal of the ECC for ReconAfrica's 2D seismic survey with immediate effect. ReconAfrica should be compelled to comply with Nature Conservation Ordinance 4 of 1975 and Forestry Act 12 of 2001. A strategic environmental assessment should be conducted immediately that also explores cross-boundary impacts of the overall development to Namibia and our neighbours, Botswana and Angola.

As registered Interested and Affected Parties, Frack Free Namibia and individual members submitted six written public objections during the EIA process for 2D seismic surveying. Our members also participated in public and community meetings in Windhoek and the Kavango regions. Not only did the Environmental Commissioner fail to consider the objections of affected community members, environmental experts, and scientists during the public participation process in a neutral and balanced manner, but evidence-based data and community inputs were stamped as irrelevant and Environmental Assessment Practitioner Dr Sindila Mwiya publicly disparaged community members and scientists.

We hereby call on the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Tourism to rescind ReconAfrica's ECC immediately to ensure that no additional harm is done to Namibia's citizens, environment and resources by ReconAfrica.

Anyone who has been adversely affected by ReconAfrica's oil drilling and seismic surveying activities, please contact the Legal Assistance Centre at info@lac.org.na or +264 61 223356.

For further inquiries on the story and how to support affected communities, please contact frackfreenamibia@gmail.com