

Wild Coast toll road confusion

Sanral insists it is still on

BHEKI MBANJWA

THE controversial plan to develop a toll plaza near Isipingo – to fund the proposed N2 Wild Coast stretch of road linking KwaZulu-Natal and East London – has been shelved, or has it?

There was confusion yesterday over whether this plan would continue after conflicting messages from members of the KwaZulu-Natal legislature and from the South African National Roads Agency (Sanral).

Mxolisi Kaunda (ANC), the chairman of the KZN legislature's transport portfolio committee, yesterday broke "the good news" to members of the multiparty committee, saying he had been informed by Sanral that the decision for the construction of the toll plaza had been overturned.

Kaunda claimed that this decision had been announced by Sanral's chief executive, Nazir Ali, during a strategic planning workshop of the department of transport.

The meeting was held last month in Cape Town and attended by chairmen of transport portfolio committees from various provinces and by representatives of all public entities dealing with transport – including Sanral, he said.

"I personally stood up and asked Nazir Ali about the plan to erect the toll plaza. In his response, he said that after taking into consideration a number of factors and objections Sanral had decided that the toll plaza would be on the Eastern Cape side of the road."

But in a bizarre twist, Sanral spokesman, Vusi Mona, denied such a decision. He said: "Sanral has not given any assurance on the funding model of the N2 Wild Coast Highway project. The decision on the funding model will be made by



the Presidential Infrastructure Co-ordinating Commission (PICC)."

Asked about the meeting, referred to by Kaunda, Mona said he did not know of such a meeting but would not deny that it took place.

Mona said Sanral had merely halted the construction of the N2 Wild Coast road on the KZN part because the agency "has not reached consensus" with the KZN province.

Mona said talks with KZN had not broken down and were continuing but would not say when they were likely to be concluded.

Construction would, however, continue on the Eastern Cape part, because Sanral was adamant it had the required buy-in from affected parties in that area (see story below).

Action

He said if Sanral took any decision on the matter at this stage that action would be tantamount to pre-empting the decision of the PICC. "All of us – including the provinces – have to take our cue from the PICC".

Despite the denial by Sanral, Kaunda said he stood by his statement. "We are not afraid to talk about this. I had specifically asked about the toll gate and I was told that it would not be in KZN. All the entities that deal with transport were at that meeting" he said.

Ruth Bhengu, the chairwoman of the National Assembly's portfolio committee on transport, also confirmed that

Ali had informed the meeting that a decision had been taken to scrap plans for the upper south coast toll. "All of us were there, and Nazir Ali did make that undertaking."

Bhengu said Ali had said such a decision had been taken because of mounting pressure on the issue. "KwaZulu-Natal had also petitioned us as the portfolio committee on this matter."

DA MPL Radley Keys was not impressed with the confusion created "on this important matter", saying he would seek more clarity.

"The question really now is who is fooling who? The manner in which this is being handled raises serious questions about the way people communicate. Were members of the portfolio committee misled or was there miscommunication by Sanral to Mr Kaunda?" he said.

All political parties in KZN have been united in opposing the plan. They have argued that the longest stretch of the proposed road would be in the Eastern Cape and therefore building a toll in KZN would mean that KZN residents were funding a road that would benefit the neighbouring province.

Transport MEC Willie Mchunu welcomed the news of the tolling being moved to the Eastern Cape.

"As the government we have always said that putting more toll gates in the Durban area will cause further financial hardship for commuters and slow down economic growth. We, therefore, welcome the decision not to put any toll gate on the side of KwaZulu-Natal as part of this Wild Coast toll road," he said.

Ted Holden the chairman of the Upper South Coast Toll Focus Group and Alliance, said he had seen the statement from Mchunu and was overjoyed.

bheki.mbanjwa@inl.co.za



INCREDIBLE: The Stig, of British motoring television show Top Gear fame, met South African swimming star Chad le Clos yesterday. Celebrities were given an opportunity to ride with the Stig at an event at Moses Mabhida Stadium.

Stig's stadium circuit sparks celebrity screams

NOELENE BARBEAU

SWIMMING star Chad le Clos may be king of the pool, but he wondered if he was out of his depth yesterday after being left breathless by "the Stig".

Le Clos and other celebrity guests and journalists were given a taste of what to expect at the Top Gear Festival, which will be held in Durban next month.

The Stig is a character on the British motoring television show, Top Gear, and his primary role is setting lap times for cars that are tested, as well as instructing celebrity guests for the programme's "Star in a Reasonably Priced Car" segment.

His character plays on anonymity, through a racing driver's full-face helmet and racing suit.

Le Clos looked anxious as he waited for his turn to ride in a new BMW M6 during the "Day with the Stig" event at Moses Mabhida Stadium.

"Can I get injured? Will I get injured," he quietly asked East Coast Radio DJ Jane Linely-Thomas.

Invited guests, including journalists and celebrities such as 5fm's DJ Fresh, Durban entertainer Mo Magic, Le Clos and Masterchef SA winner Deena Naidoo, were given an opportunity to ride with the Stig as he pushed the car to the limit.

We all watched with admiration, behind barricades, as the Stig went on a few warm-up runs, performing 360s, or doughnuts, like it was just another day at the office.

Whether he was the real McCoy we will never know – there

has been speculation over the years of his identity and whether or not there is more than one Stig.

Journalists dubbed the famous character the "Durban Stig" because we all felt he was "too skinny" to be the real Stig and speculated that he was a driver at a local car club.

My plan of action was to study the master as he deftly changed gears and manoeuvred around the safety cones, but this plan went out the window as soon as I put on my racing helmet to await my turn.

My head was so well cushioned that I could hear myself breathe. All other sounds were drowned out and everything began to play in slow motion.

"Remember to breathe. Stay calm and don't throw up," I repeated to myself as I walked to the car and strapped myself in.

I greeted the Stig, but he didn't reply. Once we were off, I found myself holding on to the door handle for dear life because I was sliding from side to side as the Stig made hard turns. At first, there were screams of terror because of the incredible speed, but these gradually transformed into screams of delight.

"Do it again," I shouted as the Stig screeched around the track performing doughnuts. There was no fear of crashing, and at one point I turned to the crowd and waved as we sped past.

Seconds later, sadly, it was all over and it was time for the next pair to have a go.

"Awesome," was all we could say afterwards. I thanked the Stig for the experience. Again, he didn't say anything.

noelene.barbeau@inl.co.za

Karabus visa date wrong

HENRI DU PLESSIS

THERE is yet another last-minute scramble before Cape Town oncologist Professor Cyril Karabus can board a plane home – the visa he was issued by United Arab Emirates (UAE) authorities was incorrectly dated and must be changed.

But Karabus's Cape Town lawyer, Michael Bagraim, today said efforts to get Karabus on a flight directly to Cape Town tomorrow were still on track.

The UAE prison authorities yesterday finally returned Karabus's passport to him after making him wait for about two weeks after his final acquittal on charges relating to the death of a child patient of his in 2002.

Karabus, 78, was arrested in the UAE last year while in transit home to Cape Town from a visit to Canada.

He had been sentenced in absentia in the UAE soon after the child had died and was listed on the UAE's wanted list at the time.

Apart from being acquitted in March and then winning an appeal which followed, Karabus also had to wait for his name to be cleared from the



CYRIL KARABUS

UAE's records.

The incorrect dates on the visa were but the latest in a string of bungles by administrators in the UAE.

"I am convinced that the South African chargé d'affaires there, Fanus Venter, will be able to get this sorted out," Bagraim said.

"Yesterday, after Professor Karabus had a fight with them, Emirates Airlines agreed to reinstate the ticket he had from there to Cape Town, but could not use at the time of his arrest."

"There is a seat for him on a flight tomorrow morning, which will have him back in Cape Town by tomorrow afternoon."

"Luckily, when Fanus (Venter) went to pre-arrange the departure for the professor this morning, he discovered the dates on the visa were wrong. It could have caused some official at the airport tomorrow to prevent Professor Karabus from flying, because the dates did not cover a part of the time he was in the UAE under arrest."

"Fanus Venter was a real star for us over there. He did so much and it is not as if this was the only work he had to do," Bagraim said.

Drug laboratory trial adjourned

RIZWANA SHEIK UMAR

DOCUMENTS relating to the manufacture of drugs and descriptions of scenarios that may arise when interrogated by the police were allegedly found at the premises of a Newlands West couple.

The State alleges that documents and invoices for the buying of chemicals were found at a farm belonging to Mogenderan and Nirusha Gounden, who with their co-accused, Monogran "Cliffy" Govender, are facing four counts of drug dealing, one count of possession of unlicensed ammunition and one of corruption.

The trio appeared in the Durban Regional Court yesterday and the trial was adjourned to May 21.

The couple's counsel, advocate Shan Govender, told the court that new statements in the State's records had been included which he had not seen before.

Govender said he needed time to consult with his clients.

Monogran Govender's attorney, Devin Moodley, said he had requested access to certain exhibits and documents last

month but had not received them.

State advocate Annelize Harrison said an expert witness was in hospital and would only be available after May 20.

The trial will resume next week in the Ntuzuma Regional Court.

According to the State, the documents seized included one that described a situation that may arise when police carry out a drug investigation. It sets out the line of questioning and techniques of interrogation that police may resort to.

Police also seized the metal dyes that fit into the tablet-making press and a large quantity of laboratory equipment.

An article from Pharmaceutical Technology titled, "The Granulation Process 101-Basic Technologies for tablet making", an internet article, "The Nutrition Farm-Inactive Ingredients", a diagram of a tablet press and lists of chemicals and their cost were also recovered.

Documents relating to the manufacture of drugs and a tax invoice from CJP Chemicals for the purchase of magnesium stearate were also found.

rizwana.umar@inl.co.za

Minister on offensive over R9bn Wild Coast toll road

NOELENE BARBEAU

THE government has embarked on a "big hearts-and-minds-campaign" to win people over to the toll road planned for the N2 between East London and Durban, says a senior environmental lawyer.

Cormac Cullinan was referring to a meeting the Department of Rural Development had at the weekend with politicians, businessmen, chiefs and traditional leaders from Pondoland in the Eastern Cape about the new highway, which would run through the amaMpondo community.

The R9 billion, 560km project would cut 75km off the existing route.

Department spokesman, Mtobeli Mxotwa, said Rural Development Minister Gugile Nkwinti, the chairman of the presidential infrastructure co-ordinating committee, had called for and chaired the meeting in Flagstaff.

"We wanted the buy-in from the community (for the extension of the N2 to run along the coast from East London to Durban), which was unanimous. The amaMpondo community, who had previously objected, were misinformed," said Mxotwa.

"They thought they would be forcefully removed and relocated like in the days of apartheid. The minister put that misconception to rest. What the people needed was consultation and we did this on Saturday."

The proposed N2 Wild Coast Toll Highway, which originally envisaged a toll plaza at Isipingo, south of Durban, has been fraught with controversy for over a decade.

Civil society groups and af-

affected communities had separately filed papers in the Pretoria High Court calling for the environmental authorisation to be set aside.

Mxotwa said it was the government's vision to have a road that would cut costs and time as well as provide a "far safer" alternative to the existing highway, which has a high accident rate. He said should people have to be moved to make way for the road, they would be adequately compensated for their land.

"The people are not opposed to construction of the road. They want the local roads to be upgraded," said Mxotwa, adding that the area "has potential for tourism".

He said the road would be built by the National Rural Youth Service Corps – unemployed youth who have been trained by the department to build roads.

Lawyers

When asked about the pending court matters, Mxotwa said the legal issues would be handled by lawyers, but the project would go ahead.

Sapa reported on Monday that Nkwinti had wanted a political management committee to be established to drive the N2 project. It would be led by amaMpondo King Zanozuko Tye-lovuyo Sigcau, who, it has long been reported, is in favour of the project.

However, Cullinan, who is representing many of the amaMpondo opposing the highway, said the rightful king was yet to be appointed as a Constitutional Court judgment was still pending.

Social worker John Clarke, who has been working with the amaMpondo for the past seven

years, explained that King Justice Mpondombini Sigcau had become king in 1978 and had been opposed to the N2 project.

But in 2010 the Commission for Traditional Leadership decided he was not the rightful heir and found that his nephew, Zanozuko Sigcau, should have been king.

King Justice challenged this all the way to the Constitutional Court, where judgment was reserved, but the 71-year-old monarch died in March after a stroke.

Cullinan said: "Most of the Pondo people are opposed to the construction. Through a big hearts-and-minds campaign, Sanral (South African National Roads Agency Limited) and the government are trying to win people over. This doesn't change our court challenge."

He said they were adamant an unfair process had been followed. "This is just an attempt by the government to put pressure on people to withdraw their objection."

Cullinan said the community was upset at not knowing exactly where the road would go, what would happen to graves and who would be compensated.

"The department was told at the outset that the community wasn't consulted and this was ignored. It's a bit late to consult after the decision has been made," he said.

Clarke and Cullinan believe the real aim of the project is to facilitate mining along the Wild Coast, an area they said was globally important for its flora. Cullinan said their court matter was at an early stage and that Molewa and Sanral were yet to file replying papers.

noelene.barbeau@inl.co.za

WEATHER

DURBAN

TODAY
Fine
12°/27°

Discomfort index 24°

TOMORROW
Fine to partly cloudy
16°/27°

Discomfort index 26°

PIETERMARITZBURG

TODAY
Fine
9°/28°

Discomfort index 30°

TOMORROW
Fine to partly cloudy
10°/26°

Discomfort index 26°

TEMPERATURES

	Min	Max	DI
Empangeni	18	28	26
Kokstad	04	24	21
Ladysmith	05	25	23
Newcastle	09	26	25
Port Shepstone	17	27	27
Richards Bay	18	28	26
Ulundi	09	27	27

RAINFALL

	DBN	PMB
This month	38.8	24.2
Month average	59	24
This year	460.2	396
Year average	1 009	844

TIDES

HIGH TIDE: Today	06.15, 18.41
Tomorrow	06.53, 19.24
LOW TIDE: Today	00.08, 12.27
Tomorrow	00.45, 13.06
Sunset today	17.11
Sunrise tomorrow	06.34
Moonrise	10.39
Moonset	22.35

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