



Scoping report completed for controversial N2 project

By: Mariaan Olivier

Published: 12 Apr 07 - 16:02

Independent environmental consultant CCA Environmental, in association with Nomi Muthialu & Associates, has completed the final scoping study for the controversial N2 Wild Coast project, which would connect major cities in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal along a 560-km route.

This report, which forms part of the second environmental-impact assessment (EIA) study undertaken on the project after a previous record-of-decision had been overturned following claims of a lack of independence, would now be submitted to environmental authorities for consideration and acceptance.

Local conservation groups have been fighting to preserve the coastline for a number of years, with threats of a highway and mining activity in the area high on the agenda.

Australian miner Mineral Commodities has prospecting rights over five coastal blocks and has recently applied for a mining right.

However, CCA Environmental said that it would submit the final scoping report to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal environmental authorities for consideration.

"If the relevant environmental authorities accept the scoping study and final scoping report and decide that the information contained in the report should be supplemented by an environmental impact report, the next step of the EIA process would be the impact assessment phase, which comprises specialists studies and the integration and assessment of information," the consultants explained in the report.

The final scoping report also dealt with issues around the legality and adequacy of the EIA process, the validity of the use of information from the previous EIA process, the consideration of alternatives, the public consultation phase, the potential biophysical, social and economic impacts of the proposed project as well as various other concerns, such as cross-subsidisation.

The report stated that various parts of the existing road required major upgrades to fulfil the function as a primary national road between economic centres and that the proposed N2 Wild Coast toll highway would provide an improved, shorter and safer road link between the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

It is believed that this new route will be about 85 km shorter than the existing N2 via Mount Frere, Kokstad and Harding.

"A shorter, more efficient transport route is viewed as an improvement to the national road network and is considered of strategic importance to the region and country as a whole," the report said.

The proposed highway would include seven mainline toll plazas, four in the Eastern Cape and three in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as 24 ramp or interchange toll plazas.

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Tel: +27(0)11 622 3744 | Fax +27(0)11 622 9350 | newsdesk@engineeringnews.co.za
<http://www.engineeringnews.co.za>