



UPDATES ABOUT THE LAKE ST. LUCIA ESTUARY

It is almost a year since the St. Lucia Mouth estuary breached naturally. The mouth breached after the heavy rain received in KwaZulu-Natal in March 2022 last year. iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority recently hosted a meeting with various stakeholders, tourism operators, conservation managers, NGOs, rural community representatives, fishers, farmers, and business owners. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and give updates on the implementation of the recommendations of the experts panel that was appointed by the Minister to review the decision taken by iSimangaliso to breach the mouth of lake St. Lucia.



According to Chapter 7 of the Panel's report that was submitted to the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Ms Barbara Creecy, the report put forward 5 key recommendation as well as 4 areas of future work. The priority regarding the implementation of each recommendation is categorised in 3 groups which is

immediate priority, medium-term priority and long-term priority. The first action plan was about examining the time frames of the implementation plan to see how realistic they were, and it was later determined that these time frames were in fact realistic and feasible. The immediate priority is recommended to be implemented within a period of 2 years, medium-term priority is recommended to be implemented within the period of 3 to 5 years and the long-term priority is recommended to be implemented more than 5 years.

As recommended, the Director General from DFFE needed to communicate with the counterparts of other departments about the implementation plan of the recommendations, and that action has been undertaken as the entity and stakeholders are now working with designated officials to implement the recommendations.

A lot of activities have been implemented including the action taken by the Minister of appointing the service provider to review the estuarine management plan. iSimangaliso scanned the market and discovered that R2.4 Million will be needed in appointing the service provider. Those funds have been secured and iCebo Environmental Consultants was appointed as the service provider. The work currently done by the service provider consists of administrative tasks and preliminary preparation only to fastrack the process. Service provider will be officially introduced to various stakeholders once they commence with their groundwork duties. Amongst others, the work to clear the dunes by removing alien vegetation is ongoing.

The process of appointing the ecologist has started as the advert and interviews has been done. They are expected to start working soon. The review plan will be the task of the ecologist when they start working and the budget for that has been made available. iSimangaliso has been working tirelessly with various stakeholders and the task team to ensure that issues related to Lake St Lucia are resolved. However, the environmental conditions on the ground keep affecting the progress in various ways.

On the meeting held on the 16 March 2023, some community members and the affected people told the meeting that their farms are still being inundated with water, and the situation has deteriorated as a result of the current environmental conditions

Some have the impression that scientists have been given too much power because iSimangaliso keeps mentioning them and claiming that there will be no progress without their intervention, even though these scientists are not the ones who are suffering losses of their livelihoods, children, and farms that are supposed to provide food for their families. They feel the longer this is postponed, the more dire the current situation will become. However, the CEO of iSimangaliso Mr Sibusiso Bukhosini clarified to the meeting that scientists have not been given power to make any decisions on behalf of the organization but the truth of the matter is that there are legislative processes that need to be adhered to, and the organization is trying its level best to acquire assistance quicker, and he further mentioned that he took the concerns of the community very seriously.

The CEO continued to explain that he wanted to reaffirm his commitment to the collaborative effort and an improved relationship with the stakeholders in both his role as the CEO of the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and as a human being in

general. He expressed his gratitude and appreciation for all the contributions that have been made and received thus far from all that are involved in this process.

Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Ms Barbara Creecy also visited iSimangaliso on the 10th of March 2023 to inspect the progress made with regard to the issue of the estuary and back flooding. She had a meeting with subsistence famers, commercial famers, affected parties and stakeholders at St. Lucia Town hall. This was her follow up to her previous visit which was on the 28th of April 2022 where she tabled the report from the panel of expert who reviewed the decision taken by iSimangaliso to breach the mouth of lake St. Lucia.

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Statement issued by iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority

Media enquires

MLO: Mr Bheki Manzini

Call/WhatsApp: 060 533 2082

Email: bhekimanzini@isimangaliso.com