

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The applicant, Ikamva Lethu Farms (Pty) Ltd, intends to transform ~920ha of the Remainder of Farm 653 (hereafter referred to as '**Farm 653**'), measuring ~1191ha in extent, to plant ~708ha of a variety of citrus and install associated infrastructure. Associated infrastructure includes, internal roads, laydown areas, windbreaks and dams. In addition, an area of ~5.6ha will be disturbed to accommodate the installation of two irrigation pipelines across the following properties, not located on Farm 653:

- Remainder of Farm 714
- Portion 3 of Farm 558
- Portion 39 of Farm 558
- Portion 6 of Farm 558

Sections of the proposed pipeline is required to be installed in the reserve of a proclaimed public road (MR00470). The farm portions included in this assessment are located within the SRVM and the nearest town is Sunland, ~3.5km northeast of Farm 653.

In terms of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended), published in GN R326, 327, 325 and 324, promulgated under Chapter Five of the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998) ("NEMAA"), and published in Government Gazette 40772 on the 7 April 2017, the project requires full Scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment (Scoping and EIA), prior to the commencement of any activities on the site due to amongst others, activities listed in GN R325, namely: *"15. The clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation, excluding where such clearance of indigenous vegetation is required for -..."*

Chapter Four of the Consultation Scoping Report (CSR) provides details of the listed activities which require Environmental Authorisation. The project applicant has appointed Public Process Consultants as the independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) to undertake the Scoping and EIA for the project. The competent authority who must consider and decide upon this application is the Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT), Cacadu Region.

Subject to the outcome of the assessment process, specialist studies, technical input and consultation process, the project applicant, Ikamva Lethu Farms (Pty) Ltd, intends to utilise the agricultural potential of the land for the establishment of citrus orchards. Farm 653 measures ~1191ha in extent and is zoned for agriculture.

In order to provide irrigation water to the proposed agricultural development the applicant also proposes the installation of two irrigation pipelines over a length of ~8km. The total footprint area that will be disturbed by the installation of the pipelines is conservatively estimated at ~5.6ha (7m x 8000m). It is further proposed, that an existing dam (current capacity ~17 000m<sup>3</sup>) be expanded to a capacity of ~45 000m<sup>3</sup> and that three new dams with a capacity of ~45 000m<sup>3</sup> each, be constructed in order to supply the required irrigation water for the proposed development. The combined water storage capacity of the expanded, as well as three newly constructed dams will total ~180 000m<sup>3</sup>.

Existing infrastructure on Farm 653 is proposed to be renovated and used for the storage of vehicles, pesticides, herbicides and to provide administrative support to the agricultural development as well as accommodation for five individuals.

The proposed agricultural development on the Farm 653 can be divided into the following phases, which are outlined in more detail in the sections below:

- Preconstruction;
- Construction; and
- Operational

### **Preconstruction Phase**

Prior to the commencement of construction activities on the site a preconstruction phase (planning) is required. For the planting of citrus, seed used in production of crops must be booked in advance and is then imported to a certified nursery for a grow-out period, during which the seeds are germinated and the seedlings grown to sapling stage. Thereafter, saplings must be planted annually in the last quarter of the year, between September to December. Thus, site preparation (outlined in the section below) needs to be complete prior to the planting of the saplings in the last quarter of the year.

The preconstruction phase for securing the block seed and growing of the saplings occurs in parallel to site preparation which is outlined below. Site preparation needs to be completed to coincide with the planting of the saplings. Thus, the timing between the purchase of the seed, grow-out period, preparation of the site and establishment of the orchards is critical.

### **Construction Phase**

The project will entail the clearing of vegetation, levelling of the site, and the installation of the drip/micro irrigation system, prior to the planting of the saplings. Once the site is prepared, citrus orchards will be established (refer to the operational phase of the development). It is anticipated that vegetation clearing, landscaping, site preparation and planting will be done both by hand and with the aid of suitable earth moving equipment (excavators, bulldozers, TLBs). No workers' accommodation will be provided on site during the construction phase.

Site preparation will entail the following activities on site:

- Clearing of indigenous vegetation;
- Landscaping and levelling the site for citrus orchards;
- Securing the site (e.g. erecting appropriate fencing);
- Establishment of internal unpaved service roads and a new access point;
- Installation of irrigation pipelines (~8km) from the canal, across the Sundays River to Farm 653;
- Construction of three new irrigation dams and expansion of an existing dam;
- Installation of internal water reticulation and irrigation infrastructure;
- Planting of orchards and windbreaks (if required); and
- Renovation of existing structures to be utilised for administrative purposes.
- Installation of new supporting infrastructure (e.g. water reticulation, conservancy tanks).

The applicant has obtained a water use licence for the taking of water from a water resource in terms of section 40 of the National Water Act which entitles them to utilise 675ha of water from the LSRWUA canal system. The applicant, therefore, has sufficient irrigation water for the proposed development of ~708ha of citrus.

### **Operational Phase**

Once the site is suitably prepared the area will be utilised for the establishment of citrus orchards. Equipment required for the new operations will be stored in the renovated storage sheds and workshop areas on site. The following operational phase activities are associated with the project:

- Water for the development will be supplied from the LSRWUA canals which will be reticulated from the proposed new/ expanded balancing dams; and
- It is anticipated that a number of additional seasonal and permanent employment opportunities will be created by the project.

For more detail regarding the project description see Chapter Two of the CSR.

### **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

The area proposed for cultivation is located on Farm 653, which is situated ~3.5km southwest of Sunland, in the Sundays River Valley Municipality (SRVM). The nearest boundary of the Addo Elephant National Park is located ~ 9.7km north-east of the site. The site is currently undeveloped

and zoned for Agriculture, measuring ~1191ha in extent. The site can be accessed off the gravel "Sunland" road (MR00470) which extends between the R336 and the R75.

Apart from the partially cultivated properties adjacent to the eastern boundary of the Farm 653, which includes existing citrus orchards, the remaining surrounding properties all resemble untransformed land and the land use is predominantly game farming. Further north (towards the "Valley") of the area under assessment (along the proposed irrigation pipeline route), however, the landscape becomes largely agricultural, with a focus on citrus production.

The previous landowner of Farm 653, operated a small-scale sausage casing facility in existing sheds on the property, these activities have subsequently ceased and the previous landowner has vacated the farm. In addition, through consultation with the previous owner and based on site observations, it was determined that the farm was previously utilised for various agricultural activities. For example, the existing buildings on site include poultry facilities, kraals, vegetable tunnels, various outbuildings and sheds. The degradation and modification of portions of the vegetation is also indicative of livestock grazing and browsing which may have occurred in the past, as well as intensive cultivation which occurred historically.

The vegetation on Farm 653 was observed to be a combination of Sundays Spekboom Thicket (majority), Bontveld and Koedoeskloof Karroid Thicket. Numerous access tracks traverse the Farm, which has led to severe modification of land cover in these areas, across all the vegetation units. Edge effects have also resulted, due to the permanent removal of natural vegetation along these routes. Some degradation of portions of the Farm, particularly in the Bontveld and Koedoeskloof Karroid Thicket, were observed. This is likely due to wildlife and livestock grazing and browsing. The prevalent occurrence of *Opuntia ficus-indica* and *Opuntia aurantiaca* across the Farm, is another indication of disturbance, possibly by grazers and browsers. The degradation can be seen throughout all three of the identified vegetation types, but is most visible in the woody Thicket areas. As noted above, the Bontveld unit appears to have been degraded due to wildlife and livestock grazing and browsing, resulting in a moderately low species diversity, limited Fynbos and Grassland species, lack of rare or threatened species, and the relative abundance of *Pentzia incana*, *Felicia filifolia* and *Felicia muricata*; including patches of *Cynodon dactylon*.

The Sundays Spekboom Thicket has been severely modified on portions of the Farm immediately north and south of the MR00470, as well as on smaller pockets on the Farm, due to intensive cultivation that took place approximately six years ago. However, based on species diversity, intactness and impenetrability, and despite the presence of *Opuntia ficus-indica*, *Opuntia aurantiaca* and transformed access tracks, most of the Sundays Spekboom Thicket remains in a relatively good ecological state.

A preliminary site visit, conducted by an aquatic specialist, indicated eleven wetland habitats, six ephemeral drainage areas (surface water run-off areas) and one un-named, non-perennial watercourse/ river on Farm 635. These observations were supplemented by the review of relevant aerial imagery and planning frameworks for Farm 653.

The irrigation pipeline route is proposed to cross the Sundays River at a single point. Near the river and along the banks, the dominant vegetation is near-natural Riparian vegetation. Sections of the irrigation pipeline is also proposed to be installed in the reserve of a proclaimed public road (MR00470), as well as through private property. Most of the vegetation along the road reserve has been modified. The presence of the three FEPA wetlands identified along the proposed irrigation pipeline route, using the FEPA mapping resources, was confirmed during the site visit. A wetland occurs instream of the Sundays River. While the Sundays River is not classified as a NFEPA river the associated wetland habitat at the point of the crossing is classified as a NFEPA wetland (channelled valley-bottom). The unchannelled valley-bottom wetlands along the pipeline route have been identified as two farm dams, located either side of the MR00470.

For further information regarding the affected environment see Chapter Three of the CSR.

## OVERVIEW OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

This Scoping and EIA Process is being implemented in four phases, the details of which are outlined in Chapter Four of the CSR:

- Pre-Application Scoping Phase
- Application and Scoping Phase (***we are here***)
- Environmental Impact Assessment Phase
- Decision Making and Appeal Period

Notice of Intention to commence with Scoping and EIA was submitted to the competent authority, and sent to all identified Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) and Organs of State on 18 October 2016. Notification was provided in terms of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014 published in Government Notice R982, 983, 984 and 985 on the 4 December 2014 in Government Gazette 38282. These regulations have subsequently been amended by the publication of GN R326, 327, 325 and 324 in Government Gazette 40772 on the 7 April 2017. Therefore, the proposed Scoping and EIA process is being undertaken in terms of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended).

Copies of comments and issues that have been raised to date, as well as appropriate responses that have been provided by the EAP, are included in the Comments and Responses Trail contained in Chapter Four of the CSR.

In order to commence the legislated portion of the Scoping and EIA process, an Application Form for Environmental Authorisation in terms of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended) has been submitted to the competent authority, together with the release of the CSR for the legislated 30-day consultation period. All registered I&APs have been notified in writing of the release of the CSR for the legislated 30-day comment period.

The Final Scoping Report (FSR), together with the Plan of Study (PoS) for EIA, will be prepared for submission to the Provincial DEDEAT for their decision-making, within 44 days of submission of the Application Form. The FSR will include all the comments received from I&APs during the Pre-Application Phase, as well as the review of the Draft Consultation Scoping Report (Draft CSR) and CSR. Should DEDEAT accept the FSR and approve the PoS for EIA, the assessment process will enter into the EIA Phase.

Public Process Consultants has been appointed as the independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) to conduct the Scoping and EIA, including public participation for this application.

For further detail regarding the Scoping and EIA process including public participation see Chapter Four of the CSR.

### Identification of Issues

Issues and concerns identified for inclusion in the Scoping Report that require specialist assessment in the environmental assessment phase of the EIA have been identified using the following methods:

- Site Visit
- Preliminary input from specialists
- Desktop review of regional planning documentation and frameworks
- Scoping of issues and concerns with I&APs, including authorities and affected Organs of State, through correspondence received (emails, comment forms) in response to the project announcement, as well as the release of the Draft CSR.

Based on issues identified thus far in the process, the table below indicates the specialist studies/ input required for the EIA Phase of the Assessment Process:

SPECIALIST STUDY	BROAD SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT	PROPOSED SPECIALIST
Biophysical Assessment	To include an assessment of the potential impacts on vegetation and fauna (desktop), as well as the delineation of sensitive no-go areas, and determination of buffer zones. An aquatic assessment will be undertaken to assess the impacts on aquatic features identified on the site, including wetlands, watercourses and drainage areas. To determine the PES of the site and confirm the mapping of CBAs and ESAs, as included in various biodiversity planning frameworks, including the ECBCP and NFEPA mapping resources. To provide recommendations for management/ mitigation of residual impacts.	Deborah Vromans, Vegetation and Aquatic Specialist  Zandri Grobbelaar, Public Process Consultants
Phase 1 Heritage Impact Assessment	To identify archaeological and palaeontological features on site and assess the potential impacts on these features. To provide recommendations for management/ mitigation of residual impacts.	Dr Lloyd Rossouw, Paleo Field Services
Soil Suitability Reconnaissance Survey	Soil suitability assessment to determine the agricultural potential for commercial citrus production and provide amelioration measures for soil limiting factors.	Dr Freddie Ellis
Traffic Impact Assessment	Traffic impact statement regarding access and egress from the site onto the MR00470 road (Sunland Road) as well as the potential impact of the additional trip generation.	Cary Hastie, Engineering Advice and Services
Visual Impact Assessment	Determine any changes in the “sense of place” and visual landscape as a result of the proposed development	Henry Holland, MapThis
Bulk Services Report	To confirm that the existing capacity of the services on site (water, effluent, stormwater management). To provide recommendations if upgrades to the existing facilities are required.	Jaco Spies, JJ Spies Civil Engineers
Security Risk Assessment	Evaluation of potential elevated security risk posed by the proposed development on rhino and exotic game in the area.	Rodney Visser
<b>TECHNICAL TEAM</b>		
Irrigation Infrastructure	Estimate the quantity of water required to irrigate the proposed development, to be stored on site in new dams that are required to be constructed/ expanded. To confirm associated irrigation infrastructure layout including pipe diameters and length, as well as dam dimensions and design.	Project applicant through their irrigation specialist

The full specialist Terms of Reference (ToR) are contained in Chapter Six of the CSR. The results of the specialist studies and other relevant project information will be integrated into the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment Report (Draft EIA).

### Current Stage in the Process

This project is currently at the stage where an Application Form for Environmental Authorisation has been submitted to the competent authority, together with the release of the **Consultation Scoping Report (CSR)** for the legislated minimum **30-day** competent authority and I&AP review period. The comment period will take place from the **12 March 2018 to the 16 April 2018**. The next step in the process will be the submission of the FSR to the competent authority within 44 days of submission of the Application Form. No comment period is proposed for the FSR.