

# Work won't start on next phase of Mokolo-Crocodile transfer scheme until EIA appeal finalised

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The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) has confirmed that work on the R12.3-billion Mokolo-Crocodile Water Augmentation Project Phase 2A (MCWAP-2A) project will not commence while there is an appeal against the project's environmental impact assessment (EIA) authorisation.

In June, the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) announced that it had commenced with the implementation of MCWAP-2A, which is designed to transfer water largely to support mining and energy activities in the Limpopo province, including Eskom's Medupi coal-fired power station.

In April, however, Earthlife Africa and groundwork lodged an appeal against the EIA authorisation issued to the DWS in December 2018 by the then Department of Environmental Affairs, currently the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF).

In their notice of appeal, prepared by the Centre for Environmental Rights, Earthlife Africa and groundwork called on the Minister to review and set aside the authorisation, owing to the project's high environmental impacts, including the project's climate impact as a result of it supporting the coal industry in the province.

The MCWAP-2A involves the transfer of water from the Crocodile river to the Steenbokpan and Lephalale areas, including the implementation of the river management system in the Crocodile river and certain tributaries.

The DWS says the project is aimed at significantly increasing the supply of water to the Lephalale area, which is currently "experiencing developmental pressure due to an increase in population and economic activity, as well as supplying water to Eskom".

Its main components include an abstraction weir, a pump station and a 160-km pipeline and the bulk raw-water infrastructure is being designed and sized to meet existing and future demand over a 20-year period.

DWS spokesperson **Sputnik Ratau** tells *Engineering News Online* that, in terms of the provisions of the applicable legislation, a project cannot commence while there is an appeal against an EIA authorisation.

"However, this does not prohibit any organisation from continuing with its preparatory work in anticipation of a positive outcome," he adds, noting that the TCTA and DWS are providing responses to the appeal.

“In terms of the legislation, the next step is for the DEFF to decide on the appeals and to respond.”

The project, Ratau says, is at the preparation stage, with the tender-design and documentation phase having commenced.

The TCTA will manage the procurement process, while the GBN JV – comprising Gibb, Bigen Africa Services and Nyeleti Consulting – was appointed in April as the project’s professional service provider, responsible for the design and construction supervision of the project.

The TCTA has also been mandated to approach the financial market for funding proposals for the 89% commercial portion of the project once all outstanding issues have been resolved.

TCTA is exploring the funding options for the MCWAP-2A, with the commercial portion to be repaid through tariffs charged to offtakers based on their “licensed volume over a period of 20 years post completion of construction”.

The 11% social portion is to be funded through yearly fiscal transfers from the DWS, which commenced in the 2018/19 financial year.

“Further allocations are earmarked for the 11% social component of the project,” Ratau says. 

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