

Pro-mine protest marks first day of WWF-SA's #JourneyOfWater

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On the WWF-SA Journey of Water protest this week, Atha-Africa Ventures claims it is “aware there are members of the historically disadvantaged community who feel enormously aggrieved by the duplicitous role of the WWF and other environmental NGOs in the declaration of the Mabola Protected Environment.

“The stance adopted by them during the declaration process favoured the co-existence of developmental aspirations of the community and environmental protection.”

But, since the declaration, the stance “has changed considerably to anti-mining and anti-development” and “this has angered the local community”.



File picture: Ross Jansen/ANA Pictures

The mining company claims that WWF-SA used its Journey of Water Campaign as an “attack against mining and development in the Mabola region in the face of the marginalised community calling for jobs and a better life for all”.

It has denied any involvement in the protest.

Atha-Africa has “repeatedly” invited the WWF and the CER to engage with it. “Our door remains open although we will vigorously defend our position, and that of the underprivileged who will soon be our neighbours – if it comes to that.”

But Angus Burns, of the WWF-SA, disputes these allegations.

“There is plenty of evidence to show that the provincial government and the Mpumalanga Parks and Tourism Agency did through consultation in the run-up to the declaration.”

WWF-SA is not part of the ongoing litigation, but does support it.

“We’re not insensitive to the fact that impoverished people need jobs and we have spent over a decade working with local people on land reform and biodiversity stewardship, helping to uplift many local communities. We are exploring many alternative forms of job creation.

“It’s sad this polarisation is being driven by an agenda. A mine in a water-source area is an ill-conceived idea and one has to look at the bigger picture – water security in the national interest.”

Burns points out the trail of documentation that exists to show the sensitivity of the Mabola Protected Environment. “Atha was well aware of the intention to declare the protected environment as far back as 2011.”

Melissa Fourie, of the CER, says: “In all our work with coal mining communities, mining companies destroy the environment, they don’t give people jobs and take away their livelihoods.”

Bobby Peek, of groundWork, says it appears this week’s protest was well” organised”, but that many of the protesters were from Volksrust 70km away.

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