Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA)

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**A Not for Profit Organization (NPO), NPO No. 153-572**

 16th October 2024

Att: Ms Dineo Moraile

Department of Mineral Resources

Meintjies St. Park St. and Schoeman St.

Sunnyside. Pretoria

**Re: MEMORUNDUM OF DEMANDS AGAINST VLAKFONTEIN, SPRINGFIELD AND REDAN SIDING COAL PROJECTS.**

Vaal Environmental Justice Alliance (VEJA) is a community based NPO campaigning for environmental justice in Vaal communities, nationally and internationally.

Working along the Vaal Barrage Catchment, VEJA and affected communities have continually been denied the right to a clean Vaal River, access to clean water for households in previously and currently excluded communities, access to practice Religious and cultural activities in an AMD free Vaal River system under the compromise of giving mines water access priority.

In the light of underlying issues regarding decommissioned mines that have not been rehabilitated, namely Waterdal Quarries, Springfield coal mine and the illegal sand mining along the Vaal River, the **recent proposed Vlakfontein, Springfield and Redan Siding open cast coal mines in Vereeniging** pose a serious threat to local committees and farmers, to land, to water and livelihoods. We call on the DMRE to bare cognisance that communities have been excluded from public participation processes regarding the proposed coal projects in Vlakfontein, Springfield and Redan Siding to name a few, **Waterdal AH, Eatonside, Dreamland AH, De Duer, Meyerton, Sicelo, Roshnee, and Lenteland AH**.

The Vaal Triangle has a long history of industrial coal mining along the Vaal River, with minimal or no rehabilitation efforts. Additional coal mining in the catchment area threatens to further compromise the fragile wildlife, farm animals, and broader biodiversity. The proposed coal projects fail to justify their water usage and demand, particularly given the already strained supply from the Vaal Dam to residents in the area. We will all be affected by this additional demand which also threatens to contaminate the scarce water we have. VEJA calls on the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy to come back to the Catchment Management Forums as a **duty of dare**, to come and visit mining affected communities before, during and after mining to ensure that the constitutional rights (especially sections 27 and 24) of local communities and residents are protected, maintained and sustained.

Seventeen years ago, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries declared us a **Vaal Triangle Airshed Priority Area** due to poor air quality. Despite various interventions, the air quality has not improved. Introducing more stressors to this area will exacerbate the respiratory and health issues already affecting many residents.

The Department of Mineral Resources and Energy needs to come visit communities that are already affected by Vlakfontein, Springfield and Redan Siding coal projects, to obtain a better view, fair and justifiable conditions of why Glubay Coal Mine should not be allowed to go ahead with its proposed coal projects.

***Our Demand:***

* There is a **Rand Water pipeline situated 50m radius within the proposed Vlakfontein Coal mine**. As concerned affected residents we demand to know how the safety of water infrastructure will be guaranteed. Failure by Glubay Coal Mine to comply with by laws and statutes herein, Glubay Coal Mine and Zitholele Environmental Consultants have lied and continually keep misleading affected communities about a new technology that they want to experiment with in the Vaal.
* Open cast mines are known to reduce water tables. The proposed coal projects herein are going to have a huge impact on the water tables here, where local farm lands, housing and the water tables are going to be harshly affected. With frequent failure like all historical mining activities, we demand that DMRE take full responsibility of coal mining rehabilitation, restore previous damage and prevent further negative impacts on housing by mine blasts, dewatering, and decanting of shafts; and to ensure that water is adequately treated and cleaned before it is released back into the natural environment.
* Climate change has devastating consequences for the living, particularly lower-class communities who are already affected and excluded from socio-economic development. A lot of communities in South Africa have no access to electricity. The scoping reports presented by Zitholele Consultants on behalf of Glubay envisage that the coal produced is going to be shipped for international markets. Leaving host communities with ecological and health externalities to live with. Vaal is home to Seriti Coal Mine, Sasol Sigma, and Ceramic Industries to name the big players who have hardly shown any gratitude for being a hosted neighbour. With the failed trail of all listed mines in the Vaal according to the Social Labor Plans envisaged within the MPRDA, how does DMRE plan to enforce law and regulations for non-complying mines regarding the deliverable objectives of the MPRDA, particularly with the SLPs and community beneficiation programmes?
* Coal mines are known to consume large quantities of fresh water. We demand the truth about not only a professional expert opinion, but an honest and practical analysis on how Glubay is going to get the required amount of water to wash 1.7 trillion tonnes of coal daily? Should DMRE consider issuing an Environmental Authorization for the proposed Vlakfontein, Springfield and Redan Siding coal mines, will the decision be considerate of the environmental impacts and implications of a project of such a magnitude?
* We are not convinced that Glubay Coal is going to comply with the **NEMA, MPRDA, and now the Climate Change Act. Given the noncompliance with Sec.24 by Glubay and with NEMA**, to the exclusion of affected communities in current processes. We hope and trust that DMRE is not going to compromise the environmental justice of the people, and the natural land of the Vaal as enshrined in the constitution of RSA.

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