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State eyes mining in Mpumalanga

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Vereeniging - South Africa's state-controlled mining company has shifted its sights from the Cape winelands to the sensitive Chrissiesmeer conservation region.

Sandile Nogxina, director general of the Department of Mineral Resources, announced only days ago, after tremendous public pressure, that the state-controlled mining company had withdrawn its application for prospecting rights in the Bottelary region in the Cape winelands.

On Thursday a document that includes a so-called environmental impact study for 12 farms in the Chrissiesmeer conservation area was leaked to Koos Pretorius, chairperson of the Mpumalanga Lakes District Protection Group (MLDPG).

The environmental impact document has supposedly been drawn up by the state-controlled mining company African Exploration Mining and Finance Corporation (AEMFC) itself.

No process of public participation has been followed. Sake24 understands that the application for prospecting rights was submitted to the regional office of the Department of Mineral Resources in Witbank, and is in the process of receiving approval.

Pretorius said the situation had now become totally ridiculous.

Prospecting rights for precisely the same area were awarded to the Khulile Mines company two years ago.

It took the MLDPG a whole year to extract information and documents from Khulile about the approval of the prospecting rights. When these were eventually received, the MLDPG appealed against them.

There has since been dead silence about the appeal, Pretorius said.

What the MLDPG heard next was that the state mining company has now applied for prospecting rights in exactly the same area.

What happened to the appeal? The MLDPG has had no further communication.

Pretorius said he understood that prospecting rights for the AEMFC were close to approval. Should this be the case, the MLDPG will go to court.

The AEMFC wants to prospect for coal in the buffer zone of the protected Chrissiesmeer region.

The MLDPG is busy having the region declared a Ramsar (important wetland) area. There can be no mining in this water-rich area, Pretorius insists.

The MLDPG reckons the AEMFC has acted unconstitutionally in waiving the process of public participation.

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