

Nylsvley Area: Prospecting Rights Application in respect of Coal

In a notice dated 14 May 2010, the consultants Digby Wells & Associates (DWA) published a notice on behalf of their client, the African Exploration, Mining and Finance Corporation (AEMFC), a State-owned mining company, in terms of which AEMFC is applying for the right to prospect for coal on certain properties in the vicinity of Nylsvley and the Nylsvley Nature Reserve.

The notice defines two categories of properties: those which for environmental reasons, it has excluded from this application; and those which are included. The notice is attached to this note.

Also attached is a hastily-compiled sketch map of the area, showing the location of the Nyl River; Nylsvley Nature Reserve; the two sets of properties relating to this application; and an outline of the area potentially underlain by coal.

The latter is taken directly from the 1:250 000 scale metallogenic map of the Nylstroom/Modimolle sheet 2428, published by the Council for Geoscience in 1999. It in turn is based on all earlier mapping in the region and is the most recently published mapping of the area. Essentially, the area shown to be potentially underlain by coal coincides with the earlier definitive mapping of the Springbok Flats coalfield as summarised in the paper by De Jager (1986). However, it is possible that there are results from drilling undertaken by the Council that show further extensions to the coalfield, but which are not published.

The Springbok Flats coalfield has been known about for almost a century. During a thirty year period following World War II, the field, which extends from south-west of Pienaarsrivier towards Roedtan in the NE, was drilled extensively by the then Government Geological Survey. A substantial resource of poor to high grade coal was defined in three main blocks, the central one of which lies to the east of Nylsvley. In the 1980s, the field was examined in detail by various mining companies and Mintek, but was found to be commercially unattractive. The principal reason for this conclusion was that the coal was found to be very closely associated with *uranium* mineralisation, in places at quite high grade; but no technology was available that could separate the one from the other – and if the coal were to be burned without removal of the uranium, potentially serious radioactive fallout could result. Recently, the field has been receiving renewed attention from mining companies, especially junior players. In addition, the field has been the subject of prospecting applications for its possible coal-seam gas potential. (This is a separate application process administered by the new Department of Energy: gas licences can overlie prospecting licences for coal.)

The sketch map reveals a strange result: the farms excluded from the application (shown in yellow), according to the notice, generally *do* have potential to be underlain by coal, whereas those farms that are *included* in the application

(shown in red), appear to have little if any potential to be underlain by coal – with the exception of Voordeel 559KR.

The sketch map does not show the important streams that drain from the Waterberg escarpment to the north-west of the N1 freeway into the Nylsvley: these may be as sensitive environmentally as the vlei itself.

Even if commercially exploitable coal (or uranium) is not delineated in the area, the exploration process itself, especially if it involves an extensive drilling grid – as it must – could lead to serious environmental pollution of the surface and groundwater that flows into the Nylsvley basin. This in turn could have a detrimental, and potentially devastating impact on the important birdlife that frequents the wetland, given the nature of the combined coal/uranium mineralisation.

Interested and Affected parties wishing to register their interest and thereby to join the environmental assessment process, must do so within 14 days of the date of the notice, i.e. by 28 May 2010, in writing, to DWA.

RG Wadley
18 May 2010.