

SAVE THE OVERBERG: protecting a unique landscape

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The Overberg region in the Western Cape of South Africa is a place of rolling green hills, unique biodiversity, and fertile soils. Not only does it play host to NAMPO Cape, organised by Grain SA and Bredasdorp Park NPC, but the area holds immense significance for agriculture.

With its fertile farmland supporting crucial grain farming and providing essential food resources, the Overberg is often referred to as the breadbasket of the Cape Province.

Over the years, the region has undergone a remarkable transformation through conservation agriculture. By adopting practices that retain moisture and promote sustainable land use, farmers have turned what was once a high-risk, low-yield area into a region known for relatively stable grain production and commendable yields.

The success of conservation practices has breathed new life into the farming communities of the Overberg. It has not only stabilised but revitalised agriculture, contributing to the overall progress of the sector.

Large-scale mining operations are likely to disrupt farming and reduce farmable land in the area

While much of the Overberg landscape has been transformed for agriculture, crucially important natural areas remain. These areas must be protected to maintain the delicate balance between farming and conservation.

The Overberg plays a vital role in South Africa's agricultural landscape, combining productivity with environmental responsibility. However, this idyllic landscape faces a significant threat from mining activities.

The threat

It is reported that Cienth, a shell mining company with a single director, Rosie Mvala, has filed several applications for a mining prospecting license. If approved, Cienth will have exclusive rights for 30 years to explore about 4 200 ha of farmland in the region.

Cienth plans to establish vast open-cast mines, with the aim of mining gold, silver and tin. This would turn a large part of the region into barren land.

Impact on the Overberg

The consequences would be far-reaching and concerns include risk to livelihoods should the project progress from prospecting to actual mining. Groundwater contamination is another concern, while the ecological impact could be devastating for the Renosterveld, including vital wetlands.

Large-scale mining operations are likely to disrupt farming and reduce farmable land in the area. The noise, dust and heavy machinery associated with mining activities are likely to negatively affect crop yields and quality – including wheat, barley, canola and grapes – far beyond the direct footprint of the mine.



According to Carl Reiche of the Save the Overberg campaign, the affected areas downstream – the Kars wetland right through to De Mond Nature Reserve (approximately 1 000 km²) – will become contaminated and sterile. The De Mond Nature Reserve, in the Overberg between Struisbaai and Arniston, has been a Ramsar site wetland since 1986.

Community action

In response, concerned residents, land users, and the Save the Overberg Coalition have united. Led by the Napier Farmers' Association, this voluntary association fights against the mining application. Their mission is to protect the district's future.

Reiche explained that the coalition, a voluntary association, works to:

- » Protect the character, environment and heritage of the Overberg;
- » initiate, support and promote activities that conserve the Overberg's natural environment;
- » protect, conserve and maintain the catchment areas and rivers of the Overberg, in particular the Kars River and Heuningnes River;
- » protect and promote the natural and cultural heritage of the Overberg;
- » protect and promote sustainable livelihoods, particularly in agriculture and tourism; and
- » conduct litigation proceedings in court as may be necessary.

How you can help

'Comments by interested and affected parties on the Basic Assessment Report closed on 15 July. Where we stand now is that to date no large-scale agricultural business or agricultural input supplier has come on board. Donations and funding will be needed pending the decision by the the Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources,' said Reiche.

He urged all those interested and affected to add their voice to the cause by registering on the Save the Overberg website, as well as to spread the word and share messages on social media to raise awareness. ●

For more information visit www.savetheoverberg.com