

VLAKFONTEIN FARM CALVINIA

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Attention: Mr Clinton Geyser

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COMMENTS ON THE (DBA): PROPOSED UPGRADE AND EXPANSION OF THE CALVINA BULK WATER SUPPLY, HANTAM LOCAL MUNICIPALITY NORTHERN CAPE

INTRODUCTION

As owner of the farm Vlakfontein, I object to the proposed developments to abstract large amounts of water from Vlakfontein and neighbouring farms. I have also serious concerns about the way in which I as a landowner, been treated and taxpayer's money been spend.

AGRICULTURAL SITUATION

I am discussing a few concise points of serious concern, about the proposed project:

1. As a citizen of this country, I paid large amounts of money for this farm. It is my right to utilize these resources to the best of my abilities to return an income. Any degrading of this property, either by die drying up of boreholes or wetlands, leads to lessor income in the first place and in the second place a devaluation of the value of my asset. The municipality can by no means, safely project what will be the outcome of extracting such large amounts of water. From experience elsewhere in the Karoo and even on this farm, it can be certain that serious water problems lays ahead in the future.
2. Farming in the Karoo dated over centuries. Underground water resources are mainly been used for drinking of livestock and a few households. This keep a balance of the low rainfall and not over utilising the ecosystem. Wherever a

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mass scale pumping has been done, serious effects, soon develop like boreholes, fountains and wetlands drying up in a wide circle. The problem gradually creeping in and the degrading is sometimes buffered by years of good rainfall. The drying up of the ecosystem is most noticeable in periods of extended droughts. The frequency of droughts and seasonal droughts are been accelerated by these unnatural extraction and the abuse of the system.

3. The way in which Government and local municipalities approach long term assets and funding over the past few years, do not send a trustworthy signal, that they embrace long-term sustainability.

The management and control of this proposed telemetric system, ask for highly skilled people, who is not always available in a town like Calvinia. The problem is mainly the integrity of running the system. To entrust ill equipped managers of a local municipality, with a highly sensitive resource, which was for generations the livelihood of farming communities, is of great concern. The absence of mature farming leaders, which was the visionaries and strategic thinkers in the past, is also of great concern. Their dept of character (like the Karoo Busch) made them survived the severest of droughts. We can learn from them to be extremely conservative, with the utilization of underground water.

The time horizon (period) of 20 years to write off this project at a cost of R184 million, is not feasible in the light of highly risky sustainability of water supply. Risks is been taken in the absence of strategic thinkers who do have knowledge about the ecosystems. In the meantime farmers suffer from boreholes and fountains that dry up, extra costs of deeper water levels and lots of land, that cannot be grazed.

4. The political and social system of supplying grants and free housing leads to unnatural growth and scarcity of water. This imbalances can best be met by a more long-term thinking and the option of surface water. Political points can be score by building houses. That is most of the time money well spent, but the investment in a critical resource like water is not a matter of quick fix. If we count the historical costs of hundreds, if not thousands of boreholes, left dry, the repetition of erecting every time new infrastructure of pipelines and power lines - a clear picture is developing. Lessons need to be learned before we destroy the last wellfieds and it became impossible to do the alternative step to get water from the Doornrivier.
5. Once, I met a big group of German tourists along the Ceres road. Everyone staring with his binoculars to birds. I was amazed that they find it excited to

travel this dry and arid road instead of the famous Garden Route. Yet the birds need water and the only source of water is most often a water trough that's been maintain by a farmer. Sometimes the one and only water point in an area of thousands of hectares are the livelihood of the jackals, reptiles, and bucks exc. The Karoo are not like most of the places where crop farming takes place. Naturist fined the amount of animal and bird life exciting and we need to treasure this. They all need water.

6. In our thinking of ecosystems we dare not suppress the importance of semi- or permanent fountains and waterways in the Karoo. In my experience as Agriculture Extension Officer and Agricultural Economist, I moved around quite a lot over the whole of the Karoo. The extensive damage done by pumping of water to wetland systems is shown over and over again. Therefore the critical important law of the Dept. of Water and Sanitation, that farmers must not extract water for more than three quarter of a hectare of irrigation, yet millions of mega litres water for human consumption in towns is ok and does not abuse the ecosystem? The borehole on my farm (Vlakfontein), though in the road reserve is about 500 m from my own windmill, which run dry and I cannot use die adjacent camp which it supply. This new municipal borehole which they plan to use extensively, is laying close to a waterway with 4 semi- to permanent fountains (mostly seasonal), that pass my farmhouse. I am very sure that as soon as the municipality start to pump, I will not only have big problems with my house water, but it will be the last of green patches alongside die road, right down to the last fountain.
7. The local municipality did not visit me or talk to me about the borehole, they planned to sink on my property. The excuse that the borehole is in the road reserve, is of no value in the light of the above arguments. Seen in the light of dark clouds hanging over the head of every landowner. Clouds like the worst drought ever seen, expropriation of land without compensation and looting of state funds everywhere, leaves farmers with an expectancy of further abuse of his rights and a government, which excel in his 'predator status'.
8. The investment in infrastructure like boreholes, windmills, dams and water troughs came over generations at a huge cost. If any borehole dried up, the infrastructure degrade, no more gracing in this veld and even the death of small wild animals. Since 2017 a few important boreholes dried up on Vlakfontein which led me to transport water during night times and giving fodder during the day. The only contractor available sinking holes for the

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municipality was not interested to help me in my need. With cash flows at its lowest, I had to sink 4 more boreholes to keep on farming.

9. The deepening of the overall water levels has an influence on every borehole, which must be refurbished with more pipes at a major cost. These cost is not reflected in the proposed project. ***It is suggested that a very serious monitoring system of boreholes in a wide enough area been done, on a continuous basis.*** If these losses been calculated in rand, the cost results will be astonished.

10. Page 13 of the Draft Basic Assessment Report, mentioned about the sustainability of the different options. It said very strongly: *“ It must however be kept in mind that groundwater development is heavily dependent on rainfall and as such needs to be managed very carefully to ensure its sustainability. If this management is not done diligently and the rainfall again stays away for 5 years, the town of Calvinia may end up in the same situation, they are in now.”*

SUMMARY /CONCLUSION

With this individual comments as owner of Vlakfontein, **I seriously protest against the proposed upgrade of the groundwater system and suggest a longer term strategy, which imply the Doornrivier project.** Landowner's rights is protected in the constitution as well as the preservation of our natural resources.

I suggest a more strategic thinking, closer look at the real cost, payback periods and a greater sensitivity towards nature and its inhabitants.

Kind regards

**NATHAN WILSON
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