



SAUMA busy raising funds

The **Stampriet Aquifer Uranium Mining Association (SAUMA)** continues to raise awareness on concerns of pollution resulting from the planned uranium mining in the drinking-water aquifer of the Stampriet Artesian Basin (SAB).

This planned uranium mining by a Russian company, Headspring Investments, came to light for the first time at a public meeting on September 28, 2021.

Headspring Investments is a subsidiary of the atomic energy corporation of the Russian state, Rosatom.

The company commenced with exploration work on several farms in the area as from 2011 and has drilled in excess of 600 boreholes to date. Two uranium ore bodies were discovered in the main underground artesian sandstone layer (Auob Formation) of the basin. This layer is widespread throughout the basin and extends into Botswana and the RSA where the same excellent quality drinking water is pumped. The highest water yields are from this layer and it supplies the water for towns and irrigation. Numerous farm boreholes also utilize this water.

The water in the layer is strong and the water table high (i.e. artesian) so that the uranium cannot be mined by open pit or underground methods. The only method is through in-situ leaching.

Leaching involves drilling thousands of boreholes, on average 20-25m apart, pumping in a sulfuric acid solution that dissolves the uranium and associated heavy metals, and pumping out the metal-rich and radioactive solution. The metal content of the mine solution that is pumped out far exceeds the safe metal content of drinking water as indicated by the World Health Organization.

Thus, in-situ leaching takes place in the drinking water layer.

Irrigation and villages utilize the water much faster than in-situ leaching can extract it. It is therefore quite possible that water plus the mine solution will be drawn through and out of the mine area as a result of irrigation and village use. This dangerously polluted drinking water can flow for kilometres before the toxic metals are deposited by natural processes over an extended period of time.

Following a field inspection, the Department of Water Affairs in the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform withdrew two drilling permits in November 2021 due to permit requirements not being adhered to.

Meanwhile, 250 new applications for drilling permits have (provisionally) been rejected by Water Affairs, however, there are suspicions that exploration and drilling could continue.

The SAB is a water-controlled area. The underground water is also the only source of permanent, good quality drinking water in this part of the country. **Humans, animals, agriculture, tourism, etc. are entirely dependent on this water source for their survival. If mining were to be permitted in the SAB, international perceptions will adversely impact Namibia's image as a healthy tourism destination, meat exporter and the like.**

SAUMA is convinced that no mining activities – let alone uranium extraction – should be allowed in the fresh artesian water. Mineral exploration and planned mining activities in the SAB must be stopped BEFORE pollution occurs. Ideally, this would be stopped by legislation.

The SAUMA committee expects that Headspring Investments will not give up easily and the case will end up in court. SAUMA is busy with an information campaign but will be required to provide evidence to convince the authorities or a court that such an enterprise could potentially be disastrous. These actions carry financial implications.

Contributions to cover costs are therefore invited.

As Namibians, we each have a responsibility.

Please contribute AND raise awareness.