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High-Level Meeting discusses uranium mining

The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Land Reform in conjunction with UNESCO, invited stakeholders, role players and decision makers to a High-Level Meeting on the proposed in situ leach uranium mining in the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System, held at Lapa Lange close to Mariental, on Monday 17 June 2024.

A pre-meeting with 42 participants took place with ORASECOM in South Africa. ORASECOM is the transboundary river basin organisation of four countries - Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa – forming the Orange-Senqu River Commission. ORASECOM was formed to coordinate activities, implement decisions and promote the equitable and sustainable development of the resources of the Orange-Senqu River. ORASECOM provides a forum for consultation and coordination between the riparian states to promote integrated water resources management and development within the basin.

The newly appointed Head, Executive Secretary Molosiwa from Botswana, addressed the event expressing concern over the in situ leach mining, as it can affect the water used by Botswana. He also indicated that the actual size of the Stampriet Transboundary Aquifer System extends further into Botswana than originally thought.

Two UNESCO specialists, Ms Amie Legget, a Senior Environmental Scientist from Australia involved with Innovative Groundwater Solutions (IGS), as well as Dr Malcolm Siegel, from New Mexico, with extended experience in environmental geochemistry, groundwater remediation, drinking water treatment and risk assessment, both commented on the shortcomings of the Environmental Impact Assessment submitted in the application for an Environmental Clearance Certificate for Test Mining.

Both also pointed out that hydrogeological and hydrogeochemical details are missing to enable a complete understanding of a project of this magnitude and recommended that further studies and modelling be conducted. Both experts agreed that possible mining should not compromise the groundwater quality in the target aquifer – even more so if this is the only drinking water for a vast and arid area.

It is clear that participants have opposing views. The Environmental Commissioner, Timotheus Mufeti, commented that the Ministries would acquire further internal and external reviews and that further information needs to be assembled prior to making a decision.

SAUMA will closely watch any further developments and will do what is in the best interest of protecting our invaluable water resource for current and future generations.

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