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Dear Environmental Assessment Practitioners (EAPs), Environmental Managers (EMs), Regulators, Competent Authorities, Developers, Stakeholders, and Interested & Affected Parties,

Newsletter for all stakeholders involved with EIAs – *EIA Insights*

The Environmental Assessment Professionals Association of Namibia (EAPAN), Namibian Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) and Namibian Chamber of Environment (NCE) are pleased to inform you that they have started a biannual newsletter for the EIA Sector in Namibia called *EIA Insights*. Attached please find the first edition.

The environmental assessment and management sector plays a vital role in helping to promote sustainable development for the country, in accordance with the Environmental Management Act of 2007. By following best practices, Environmental Practitioners can assist the Office of the Environmental Commissioner (OEC) to guide development in ways that maximise positive development outcomes and minimise negative environmental, social and economic impacts.

Every significant development in Namibia and many smaller ones are subject to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. Projects may proceed only once the developer/proponent is issued with an Environmental Clearance Certificate (ECC), based on an approved EIA Report and Environmental Management Plan (EMP). As a result, the overall development pathway and pace of development in Namibia, from an environmental approval perspective, is shaped largely by a single government agency, the Office of the Environmental Commissioner (OEC), which carries a substantial mandate and wide-ranging responsibilities.

More than 1,000 EIAs are carried out annually. However, arguably only about 4% of projects could be classified as of high biophysical and/or socio-economic risk, while approximately 52% are considered low risk. This suggests an opportunity to refine the EIA process by introducing streamlined, fast-track compliance processes for lower-risk projects, allowing regulatory capacity and specialist expertise to focus on projects with potentially significant impacts.

A more targeted allocation of attention could help ensure that projects with minimal biophysical or socio-economic risks are processed quickly, while high risk projects receive the depth of assessment, guidance, and specialist analysis needed to support informed decision-making in the national interest. Improving this balance will help ensure that high risk projects supported by robust EIA reports would get the necessary in-depth regulatory scrutiny and progress in a timely manner.

The time required to obtain decisions on many projects is often lengthy, which has significant implications for investment and development planning. Delays result in investor capital remaining unutilised, development cycles being missed, and uncertainty within the broader investment environment. Over the past decade, Namibia has experienced a decline in investment across most sectors outside of exploration and mining, reflected both in investment flows and in the number of EIAs conducted annually. This trend affects not only foreign investors but also local entrepreneurs

and businesses. For example, the number of registered businesses and companies employing people in Namibia has declined significantly during recent years. At the same time, unemployment levels remain a major national concern, particularly among young people. These trends highlight the importance of strengthening conditions that support local and foreign investment, sustainable economic growth, job creation, and broad-based participation in the economy. Improving investment opportunities, economic activity, regulatory efficiency and thereby expanding employment, would also help widen the tax base and strengthen long-term national resilience.

These realities point to a shared priority: creating an environment that encourages both foreign and domestic investment, while maintaining environmental safeguards. Achieving this requires an efficient, predictable, and well-functioning EIA system that creates investor confidence while ensuring responsible development outcomes.

At present, only the mining and exploration sector continues to attract significant foreign investment, largely because activities in this sector are location dependent – they follow the minerals. Other sectors, however, have greater flexibility in choosing where to invest and therefore tend to favour jurisdictions with an efficient, attractive and predictable business environment. Ensuring regulatory fairness and efficiency across all sectors will help support sustainable economic growth and protect existing investments.

Namibia therefore needs an effective and efficient EIA system, which is also characterised by transparency, public accountability and support. This system includes a regulator that operates efficiently, makes timely and well-informed decisions, and has the capacity necessary to support these desired outcomes. It also requires EAPs and Developers (including Environmental Managers) who are competent, ethical, and committed to protecting the environment and promoting societal well-being.

The purpose of the ***EIA Insights*** newsletter is to provide a platform to:

- (a) share information and experiences on environmental assessments between stakeholders, and
- (b) shine a spotlight on the challenges faced by Environmental Practitioners, developers, the OEC and other stakeholders, and highlight recommendations for improvement.

We invite readers of this first newsletter to contribute to future editions by submitting articles, suggestions, photographs, pointing out challenges and suggesting how things could be improved. We need to be pro-active to ensure lessons learned (good and bad) are taken up and fed into guidelines for good environmental practices in the country. Our objective is to help improve the EIA sector at all levels.

We hope you enjoy this 1st newsletter.



EAPAN



NEWS



NCE