

Purpose of Undertaking a Public Participation Process and the Role of a Stakeholder in a Public Participation Process

Definition of Public Participation

Greyling and Manyaka, 1999, defined Public Participation as:

*“producing a process leading to a joint effort by stakeholders representing all relevant interests and sectors of society, technical specialists and the various relevant organs of state who work together to produce better decisions than if they had acted independently, and better implementation of decisions through stakeholders
“owning the process”*

Importance and Purpose of Stakeholder Engagement / Public Participation

The engagement of Interested and Affected Parties (I&AP's) and the Stakeholder Engagement Process is an important part of any environmental assessment. The main objectives and the main objectives of the a Stakeholder Engagement / Public Participation Process includes amongst others:

- Informing the adjacent landowners, tenants, and residents' associations, ward councillors, the local municipality and other organs of state of a proposed project;
- Establishing lines of communication between the stakeholders, I&AP's and the project team;
- Providing all parties with an opportunity to exchange information and to express their views and concerns regarding a proposed project;
- Obtaining comments/input from stakeholders and I&AP's, and ensuring that all views, issues, concerns and queries raised are fully documented; and
- Identifying all the significant issues associated a proposed project.

Role of a Stakeholder or I&AP in a Public Participation Process

(based on Regulation 56 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2010

In terms of Regulation 56 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2010, I&AP are entitled to the following (amongst others):

A registered interested and affected party is entitled to comment, in writing, on all written submissions, including draft reports made to the competent authority by the applicant or the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) managing an application, and to bring to the attention of the competent authority any issues which that

party believes may be of significance to the consideration of the application, provided that:

- (a) Comments are submitted within—
 - (i) The timeframes that have been approved or set by the competent authority; or
 - (ii) Any extension of a timeframe agreed to by the applicant or EAP;
- (b) A copy of comments submitted directly to the competent authority is served on the EAP; and
- (c) The interested and affected party discloses any direct business, financial, personal or other interest which that party may have in the approval or refusal of the application.

Before the EAP managing an application for environmental authorisation submits a final report compiled in terms of these Regulations to the competent authority, the EAP must give registered interested and affected parties access to, and an opportunity to comment on the report in writing.

The roles of I&AP's / Stakeholders in a Public participation Process usually include one or more of the following:

- Assisting in the identification and prioritisation of issues that need to be investigated;
- Making suggestions on alternatives and means of preventing, minimising and managing negative impacts and enhancing project benefits;
- Assisting in or commenting on the development of mutually acceptable criteria for the evaluation of decision options;
- Contributing information on public needs, values and expectations;
- Contributing local and traditional knowledge; and
- Verifying that their issues have been considered.

In order to participate effectively, stakeholders should:

- Become involved in the process as early as possible;
- Register as Interested and Affected Parties;
- Advise the EAP of other stakeholders who should be consulted;
- Contribute towards the design of the public participation process (including timeframes) to ensure that it is acceptable to all stakeholders;
- Follow the process once it has been accepted;
- Read the material provided and actively seek to understand the issues involved;
- Give timely responses to correspondence;
- Be respectful and courteous towards other stakeholders;

- Refrain from making subjective, unfounded or ill-informed statements; and
- Recognise that the process is confined to issues that are directly relevant to the application.