

## REVEGETATION AND REHABILITATION PLAN

### 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the rehabilitation plan is to ensure that areas cleared or impacted during construction activities of the Tutuka PV Solar Energy Facility are rehabilitated with a plant cover that reduces the risk of erosion from these areas as well as restores some ecosystem function. The purpose of the rehabilitation plan for the site can be summarised as follows:

- » Achieve long-term stabilisation of all disturbed areas to minimise erosion potential.
- » Re-vegetate all disturbed areas with suitable local plant species.
- » Minimise visual impact of disturbed areas.
- » Ensure that disturbed areas are safe for future uses.

This Revegetation and Rehabilitation Plan should be closely aligned with other site-specific plans, including the Erosion Management Plan, Soil Management Plan, Alien Plant Management Plan, and Plant Rescue and Protection Plan. Prior to commencement of construction, a detailed Rehabilitation Plan and Method Statement for the site should be compiled with the aid of a Rehabilitation Specialist.

### 2. RELEVANT ASPECTS OF THE SITE

The selected study area falls within the original extent of the Soweto Highveld Grassland (Unit Gm8). The short to medium high dense tussock grassland is dominated almost entirely by *Themeda triandra*, with a relatively high diversity of grasses, herbs and geophytes (Mucina and Rutherford 2006). None of the grasslands are considered to be in a pristine condition, with only a small section considered to be primary (natural) grassland. The remaining extent of primary grassland is classified as Important and Necessary, whilst the better condition rehabilitated and more diverse grassland is classified by the Mpumalanga Biodiversity Conservation Plan (MBCP) as of Least Concern. The remainder of the area has been recognised as rangelands with no Natural Habitat Remaining.

A total of 973 indigenous plant species have been recorded in the study area according to the SANBI database. Only 120 indigenous species could be confirmed present on site. A large portion of the study site is disturbed or has been transformed in the past, allowing many alien invasives to become established, with 25 alien invasive species recorded.

These grasslands are utilised by Hartebeest and Eland that are being kept within the Tutuka Power Station enclosure. Animals that may be permanently present

can be relocated, and may resettle after construction, depending on safety specifications necessitated by the development. No restricted or specific habitat of vertebrates exists on the study area and will be affected by the proposed development; especially if the proposed development remains outside the recommended buffers around wetland and seepage areas. The impact on fauna is expected to be small to negligent.

### **3. REHABILITATION METHODS**

- » Immediately after replacing topsoils in disturbed areas, the soil surface must be revegetated with a suitable plant cover.
- » It is expected that soil seed banks of indigenous vegetation will be present to initiate initial vegetation cover. However, simply applying this topsoil to a well prepared rehabilitation site does not result in the same species richness and diversity as the surrounding areas. In some areas the natural regeneration of the vegetation may be poor and the application relevant of seed to enhance vegetation recovery may be required.
- » Where possible, seed should be collected from plants present at the site during plant rescue operations. Indigenous seeds may also be harvested for purposes of re-vegetation in areas that are free of alien or invasive vegetation, either at the site prior to clearance or from suitable neighbouring sites.
- » Seed collection should be undertaken by a suitably qualified specialist who is familiar with the various seed types associated with the plant species and rehabilitation in the area.
- » Seed collection may be done throughout the year as seed ripens, but can also be restricted to summer, when a large amount of the perennial seed should have ripened. The collection of unripe seeds will reduce the percentage germination thereby reducing the effectiveness of the rehabilitation efforts. Seeds should be stored in paper or canvas bags dusted with insecticide, and sown at the onset of the rainy season.
- » Seed can be sown onto the soil, but should preferably be applied in conjunction with measures to improve seedling survival such as scarification of the soil surface or simultaneous application of mulch. Additional organic material may be added to the soil mix, if required, to assist with water retention during the early stages of seedling establishment.
- » It should be ensured that the seed mix is as diverse as possible in the first season. After the first season, when pioneer plant communities have successfully established, attempts should be made to re-sow and replant the area with more perennial and woody species. It is a process that will require several follow-ups.
- » Planting is dependent on species involved. Planting of species recommended for rehabilitation should be carried out as far as is practicable to coincide with the onset of the first significant rains. In general however, planting should

commence as soon as possible after construction is completed in order to minimise the potential for erosion.

- » The final vegetation cover should resemble the original (non-encroached and indigenous) vegetation composition and structure as far as practicably possible.
- » Progressive rehabilitation is an important element of the rehabilitation strategy and should be implemented where feasible. Re-vegetation of disturbed surfaces must occur immediately after construction activities are completed.
- » Once revegetated, areas should be protected to prevent trampling and erosion.
- » No construction equipment, vehicles or unauthorised personnel should be allowed onto areas that have been vegetated.
- » Where rehabilitation sites are located within actively grazed areas, they should be fenced, this must be undertaken in consultation with the landowner.
- » Fencing should be removed once a sound vegetative cover has been achieved.
- » Any runnels, erosion channels or wash aways developing after revegetation should be backfilled and consolidated and the areas restored to a proper stable condition.

#### **4. MONITORING AND FOLLOW-UP ACTION**

Throughout the lifecycle of the development, regular monitoring and adaptive management must be in place to detect any new degradation of rehabilitated areas. During the construction phase, the Environmental Officer (EO) and EPC Contractor will be responsible for initiating and maintaining a suitable monitoring system. Once the development is operational, the Proponent will need to identify a suitable entity that will be able to take over and maintain the monitoring cycle and initiate adaptive management as soon as it is required. Monitoring personnel must be adequately trained.

The following are the minimum criteria that should be monitored:

- » Composition and density of replanted vegetation, distinguishing between species introduced for initial revegetation only and species that are part of the pre-determined desirable end state.
- » Associated nature and stability of surface soils
- » Re-emergence of alien and invasive plant species. If noted, remedial action must be taken immediately.

The initial revegetation period post construction is estimated to be over a period of 6 months (minimum) to 12 months (maximum), or a time period specified by the rehabilitation specialist, particularly if planting of trees and shrubs occurs. The rehabilitation phase (including post seeding maintenance) should be at least

12 months (depending on time of seeding and rainfall) to ensure establishment of an acceptable plant cover is achieved (excluding invasive plant species or weeds).

As rehabilitation success, monitoring and follow-up actions are important to achieve the desired cover and soil protection. The following monitoring protocol is recommended:

- » Re-vegetated areas should be monitored every 4 months for the first 12 months following construction.
- » Re-vegetated areas showing inadequate surface coverage (less than 20% within 12 months after re-vegetation) should be prepared and re-vegetated;
- » Any areas showing erosion, should be re-contoured and seeded with indigenous grasses or other locally occurring species which grow quickly.

If the plants have not established and the acceptable plant cover is not achieved within the specified maintenance period, maintenance of these areas shall continue until an acceptable plant cover is achieved (excluding alien plant species or weeds). Additional seeding or planting may be necessary to achieve acceptable plant cover. Hand seeding may have to be considered as an option in this case.

Monitoring of rehabilitation success and follow-up adaptive management, together with clearing of emerging alien plant species should continue for as long as considered necessary.