

Hope as copper mining at lower Zambezi IBA put on hold

The Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) has turned down a mining proposal at one of Zambia's key important bird Areas - Lower Zambezi. The proposal to mine eight million tonnes of copper ore per year was put forward by Mwembesi Resources Ltd, an Australian affiliated company. The project would involve development of the main pit at Kangaluwi and satellite pits at three other areas. The lower Zambezi IBA is both, an Important Bird Area as well as a national park. Large numbers of water birds congregate, especially at drying ox bow lakes. Sandbanks are home to enormous numbers of Southern Carmine Bee-eater and smaller numbers of White-Fronted Bee-eater. The Miombo and Mopane woodlands hold a wide array of characteristic species. The Crested Guinea Fowl, African Pitta, White-throated Nicator, Sombre Greenbul and Livingstone flycatcher inhabit the deciduous thickets. The Pallid Harrier is a rare passage migrant and non-breeding visitor. Mr. Moses Nyoni, the CEO of Bird Watch Zambia (BWZ), formerly Zambia Ornithological Society, (BirdLife in Zambia), which has led a campaign to stop the mining plan said: "This the right first step the Zambia Environmental Management Agency (ZEMA) has taken in this case. Our aim is to see the mining project eventually withdrawn." "Short term economic gains should never override long term benefits to the country", he added. ZEMA's decision comes a few months after public hearings on the subject attended by Bird Watch Zambia (BWZ) and interested organisations. The public hearings were held at Chiawa Basic School, Kafue District on 16th June 2012 and Council Guest House, Luangwa District on 18th June 2012. The project received little support during the hearings since the investor failed to address key issues such as job creation and impacts on biodiversity. Mwembeshi Resources Limited have appealed to the Minister of Lands, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection to review ZEMA's decision under the Environmental Management Act of 2011. "BWZ and like minded organisations are determined to ensure that Lower Zambezi is protected from this damaging developing. We will continue engaging ZEMA and other government agencies as well as involve local communities by raising grassroots awareness. We will also demand for a comprehensive cost and benefit analysis of the mining project," said Mr. Nyoni.



The audience at the public hearing(Photo: Moses Nyoni)