

Mining and prospecting prohibition call by NGOs in South Africa

BirdLife South Africa supports the formal request by the Centre for Environmental Rights to the Minister of Mineral Resources for a prohibition on prospecting and mining in certain key areas of critical biodiversity and hydrological value and sensitivity. This is in accordance with Section 49 of the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (Act 28 of 2002) (MPRDA), which gives the Minister the discretion to prohibit or restrict the granting of prospecting and mining rights in respect of identified land. This formal request is supported by a list of proposed key areas for prohibition of rights and suggested procedural restrictions aimed at improving the environmental impact assessment process applicable to these key areas. "Mining and prospecting applications are becoming more widespread in South Africa, with many applications falling within key areas that provide very important ecosystem services, and in turn support very important economic and social activities such as agriculture and tourism", says Carolyn Ah Shene-Verdoorn, Policy & Advocacy Manager at BirdLife South Africa (BirdLife Partner). "The clash between environmental priorities and economic development has in most instances resulted in the environment being the loser and, while existing legislation is supposed to objectively regulate the processes, the implementation of this legislation at provincial levels is questionable. This is further exacerbated by high staff turnover within government departments, limited capacity and relatively poor communication between the relevant departments that are supposed to deliberate around these applications". Challenging the mining and prospecting rights issued for these sensitive areas is very costly for both the non-governmental organisations and the mining companies, and a list of clearly identified areas that prohibit prospecting and mining will go a long way in alleviating this situation. "As one of the coalition of eight non-government organizations, BirdLife South Africa has been involved in the development of this list of sensitive sites, which BirdLife South Africa feels will provide much more protection to South Africa's Important Bird Areas by prohibiting or restricting commercial prospecting and mining at sites that are also very important for South Africa's threatened and endemic birds", says Daniel Marnewick, Important Bird Areas Programme Manager at BirdLife South Africa. BirdLife South Africa recognises and applauds the steps taken by government to address the current imbalance between mining, environment and water prioritisation in South Africa, and sees this formal request to Minister Shabangu as forming part of the bigger process to address these important issues. Setting the stage for sustainable development within South Africa will ultimately benefit everyone, and will definitely promote South Africa as one of the better countries to invest in.