

Zambian High Court overturns government Copper Mining plan in Lower Zambezi

Title

The High Court in Lusaka, Zambia, on 4th February halted government approval of a plan by an Australian investor to mine copper from the Lower Zambezi National Park. The park is an Important Bird Area and is being considered for listing as a World Heritage Site.

The order staying execution of the decision to allow large scale mining? dated 6th February stops Mwembeshi Resources Ltd from mining 80 million tonnes of copper ore from the park per year, until an appeal filed by civil society groups is heard and determined. [Read more - Zambia High Court Ruling](#)

On 17th January 2014, the Minister of Land, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Mr. Harry Kalaba issued licence No. 15547-HQ-LML to Mwembeshi Resources Ltd, a subsidiary of an Australian company, Zambezi Resources Limited (ZRL). The approval came in spite of protest by Zambian environmental organisations that are concerned that such a massive project could have serious impacts on biodiversity, water and people downstream.

The Zambia Environmental Management Authority (ZEMA) had on 5th September 2012 rejected the project Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) following an appeal lodged by civil society led by the Community Based Natural Resources Forum (CBNRMF), a forum on which [BirdWatch Zambia \(BWZ\)](#), a BirdLife International partner in Zambia is an active member.

?As a unique and world renowned ecosystem with immense financial and ecological value to Zambia, the area deserves the highest form of protection,? said Mr. Moses Nyoni, the CEO of Bird Watch Zambia. ?We laud the High Court for stopping the project and we call upon the investor to withdraw this project once and for all as it has irreversible impacts on biodiversity and people? he added.

Zambian civil society groups had earlier issued a press statement condemning the Minister?s approval. The Zambia Community Based Natural Resources Forum (of which BWZ is a member), comprising over 100 Zambian organisations, registered its ?disappointment? with and ?protest against the decision by the Minister to approve the project earlier rejected by many stakeholders.? [Read more - Press release by Lower Zambezi Mining Civil Society](#)

The Forum said it would use all means available to find a sustainable solution to the issue.

They called upon Zambians and the global community to support their cause, saying the Environmental Impact Statement did not meet local and international standards.

Civil society groups that have filed an appeal in the High Court say due process was not followed in issuing the mining rights. "We are concerned about the legality and transparency of the whole process since stakeholder input was ignored," said Moses Nyoni. "We will provide positive feedback to the authorities but at the same time do everything possible to ensure that Zambian environmental laws are respected." [Read more - Lower Zambezi Mining Brief](#)

Discussions have been underway to designate Lower Zambezi as a transboundary World Heritage Site straddling Zambia and Zimbabwe. "This proposal could go down the drain and this would be sad for both countries," said Ken Mwathe, the BirdLife International Africa Policy and Advocacy Coordinator. "Zambia has internationally recognised conservation credentials; the government should maintain these by keeping mining interests out of Lower Zambezi National Park."