

Media Statement

For Immediate Release

20 June 2021

STATEMENT ON THE REPORT OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE STONES DISCOVERED AT KWAHLATHI IN LADYSMITH

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

We congregate here today to give feedback on what has been a matter of interest to people of South Africa. Over the past days the area of KwaHlathi just outside Ladysmith has been gripped by excitement following the discovery of stones which locals believed were diamonds.

This resulted in people, including those from other towns and from other provinces flocking into the area to participate in the mining activity. This posed a huge risk in terms of Covid-19 regulations and also led to the degradation of the environment.

Following consultations between the provincial government and the national Department of Minerals and Energy, a team of officials, geoscientists and mining experts conducted an inspection of the site on the 15th of June 2021. The team was able to collect samples of the stones for further testing and analysis.

During that visit we made a commitment that we would report to the community within a month. It is for that reason that earlier this afternoon, the intergovernmental task team looking into the matter of the KwaHlathi stones, met with community leaders and representatives to give a report back on findings made.

The intergovernmental task team comprised of representatives from the Department of Mineral Resources & Energy (DMRE) and its State-Owned Entities; the KZN Provincial government delegation led by the MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs MEC, Mr Ravi Pillay, and the MEC for Transport, Community

Safety and Liaison, Ms Peggy Nkonyeni; the mayor of Alfred Duma Municipality, Cllr Vincent Madlala and inkosi Sphiwe Kunene.

The community delegation was comprised of Izinduna, community leaders and representative of various community formations. We would have loved to convene a mass gathering to report back to the community directly but considering the threat of Covid-19 this was not feasible. This media briefing is therefore held in the hope that the media will help us to relay the message to all the relevant stakeholders including those involved in the mining activity in the area.

Report findings

Following the visit to KwaHlathi, a technical Sub-Task Team consisting of DMRE KZN Regional officials, Council for Geoscience, South African Diamond and Precious Metals Regulator, and Mintek analysed samples and have now produced a preliminary report.

The preliminary report shows that the site of the informal mining practises is geographically located on the edge of a Karoo dolerite sill which is not in a zone where diamond occurrences are present.

This was further confirmed by visual, geological and chemical analyses that were conducted.

The tests conducted conclusively revealed that the stones discovered in the area are not diamonds as some had hoped. In fact, what has been discovered are quartz crystals that are common across the Karoo Supergroup with an extensional fracture planes within and along the contact of Karoo dolerite sill.

The value, if any, of the quartz crystals is yet to be established but it must be mentioned that the value of quartz crystals is very low compared to that of diamonds.

Further studies to be conducted

The Council for Geoscience working with various stakeholders will institute a geological mapping programme to further understand any other potential resources that may advance socio-economic development in KwaHlathi.

Extensive geoscience studies are required in the area, at a regional scale to investigate possibilities of groundwater resources as well as any other lithologies that may be host to other natural resources that may contribute to local development and the economy of the province.

Interventions by the province

The activity seen at KwaHlathi in the past week has highlighted the socio-economic challenges confronting people in the area. Thus in responding to this particular matter of the stones, we also have to provide a comprehensive response to the socio-economic challenges as raised by the community members during our visit to the site and as communicated by community representatives during a meeting held earlier.

A report on the findings by the Council for Geoscience and on the socio-economic challenges in the area will be presented to Premier Sihle Zikalala and the entire provincial executive council. This will be the basis for us to formulate a coordinated response to all the challenges. Part of the response will have to focus on the issue of road and access to water. We will also formulate a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate the site on which digging is taking place.

We appeal to the people on site to vacate the area as what they are involved in has the potential of spreading Covid-19. The illegal mining practices also have a negative impact on the environment and land degradation that has been accentuated by the extensive diggings in the area.

We reiterate that the mining activity taking place at KwaHlathi is illegal. We urge the community to cooperate with the police and local leadership

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