

Wednesday, October 18, 2017



## Jubilation as nuclear vetoed for Thyspunt

[October 17, 2017](#) [Guy Rogers](#)

### Surprise as government overrules Eskom, opts for Western Cape site

The government's surprise effective veto of Eskom's push to build a nuclear reactor at Thyspunt near Cape St Francis has been greeted with jubilation by groups opposed to the move. The Department of Environmental Affairs has instead authorised the construction of Eskom's proposed nuclear project at Duynefontein in the Western Cape.

NoPENuke said the department's authorisation of Duynefontein, effectively vetoing the utility's preferred site at Thyspunt, was "a real victory for the little guy".

The Thyspunt Alliance said it was "a triumph for due process" and the Gamtkwa Khoisan Council said the ruling opened the way for establishment of a coastal cradle of mankind, a World Heritage site celebrating Thyspunt's unique cultural and environmental heritage.

In keeping with South Africa's nuclear process so far, the Environmental Affairs ruling arrived amid conflicting signals.

Less than a week ago, an upbeat nuclear summit at Jeffreys Bay – attended by Deputy Energy Minister Thembisile Majola and Eskom acting general manager Loyiso Tyabashe – declared the readiness of Eastern Cape youth to seize envisaged job opportunities flowing from development at Thyspunt.

More confusing still, on Sunday, Finance Minister Malusi Gigaba said South Africa had no money for nuclear.

Speaking in Washington in the US after meetings with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, Gigaba said the South African economy "at present is not in a position where it can carry the burden of nuclear technology".

Eskom's nuclear aspirations were launched a decade ago, moving through multiple environmental impact assessments (EIAs) which were submitted and resubmitted after successful challenges from the anti-Thyspunt groupings supported by pro bono studies undertaken by scientists living in St Francis.

Besides the cultural heritage issue, concerns have included Thyspunt's fragile dune wetlands and the sensitivity of the area to flooding, the existing tourism industry, the threat to the flagship chokka industry via the ejection of sand spoil into squid breeding areas during plant construction and the instability of the site, making it vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.

Having started with five possible sites in the northern, western and eastern Cape, the utility's final EIA pinpointed Thyspunt as its preferred site with Duynefontein as alternative, and this is the application Environmental Affairs ruled on.

In a declaration over the weekend, the department said it was authorising the utility to develop 4 000MW at Duynefontein, adjacent to the existing Koeberg reactor.

In the only indication of why it did not go with Eskom's preferred site, it said: "The overall environmental impacts associated with the Duynefontein site are acceptable, and materially lower than those at the Thyspunt site."

A source close to the nuclear debate said the huge swathe of material challenging Thyspunt had also likely prompted the department to shy away from possible litigation which it realised it might lose.

Whatever consternation it might be feeling, Eskom has maintained a stiff upper lip with chief financial officer Mike Nicholls welcoming Environmental Affairs' authorisation and noting only that "the other sites are still usable as no fatal flaws have been identified".

Thyspunt Alliance spokesman Trudi Malan said her organisation was happy and grateful.

"When I got the news, I cried. We are celebrating the fact that we could take part. We followed due process and did the scientific work required. We are very thankful that the system in our case worked.

"Our studies have already shown that more sustainable jobs could be created at Thyspunt via development centred on a World Heritage Site and this is what we want to establish now."

NoPENuke spokesman Gary Koekemoer said Environmental Affairs's decision was good news all round.

"For Nelson Mandela Bay, now we don't have to worry about having a nuclear plant 80km upwind, nor that it will impact our harbour waterfront project, nor that it will divert scarce water resources."

According to Eskom, if Thyspunt had been approved, infrastructure would have been shipped into the Port Elizabeth Harbour and then out over a three-year period in huge truck-trains, wrecking the city's waterfront development programme.

In 2010, then Arts and Culture minister Lulu Xingwana endorsed a report by the South African Heritage Resource Agency on Thyspunt which highlighted the presence of Stone Age middens and fish traps, and voiced her opposition to the nuclear project.

This opposition was swept under the carpet but this heritage value could now be embraced, Koekemoer said.

"Now's the opportunity to turn the site into the coastal cradle of humanity."

Gamtkwa Khoisan Council representative Kobus Reichardt said the community the council represented had felt "steamrolled" by the nuclear programme and were excited by the ruling.

"We are aiming now to appoint experts to do studies to support our drive to have Thyspunt recognised as an important cultural landscape with special environmental properties."

Eastern Cape Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism MEC Sakhumzi Somyo said last night he had not heard about Environmental Affairs' ruling but that the construction of a reactor at Thyspunt would have given the Eastern Cape a much-needed boost.

National Radioactive Waste Institute chief executive officer Dr Wolsey Barnard, who attended last week's meeting in Jeffreys Bay, said the news was a blow, in his view.

"The Eastern Cape has missed out on the opportunity to turn their GDP around. Kouga had the opportunity to become the energy hub of South Africa."

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