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Page: 21

FRACKING

Northern KZN fuel survey gets go-ahead, despite farmers' protests

Agricultural and conservation organisations in KwaZulu-Natal have expressed concern about the Department of Mineral Resources' (DMR) recent move to grant permission to Rhino Oil and Gas Exploration South Africa (ROGESA) to explore northern KZN for fuel sources. The area in question covers 870 000ha, and includes farms. Reportedly, an approval from Petroleum Agency SA was delaying the authorisation.

Sandy La Marque, CEO of the KZN Agricultural Union (Kwanalu), said the extent of the mining exploration applications in KZN was "exceptionally concerning", as they totalled more than 1,8 million hectares. She added that concerns raised by affected parties during ROGESA's

public consultation process seemed to have been disregarded.

She said Kwanalu was taking advice on how to proceed, adding that "the impact and demand [of mining exploration and mining] on the limited natural resources, and the growing demand for food production, means that sooner or later the impact will lead to losses".

Thube Zondi, secretary of the KZN chapter of the African Farmers' Association of SA (AFASA), said the association had not been consulted and would be contesting the DMR's decision.

"We want to be a permanent and key stakeholder of the DMR because its decisions affect our sector and our members. Most decisions [on mining applications in KZN] put our members at

high risk because they can lose much due to pollution [from mining activities]."

Dr Jim Taylor, director of environmental education at the Wildlife and Environment Society of SA, said his organisation had thought "reason would prevail and that the application would be turned down".

He added that fracking in KZN would have a negative impact on water supply, food production and farming activities. "In South Africa, we've all experienced the environmental degradation associated with these practices."

SLR Consulting, ROGESA's environmental impact assessors, said interested parties had until 23 October to lodge appeals against the DMR's authorisation. – *Lloyd Phillips*