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# BIO THERM WIND ENERGY FACILITY BETWEEN UITKYK AND EXCELSIOR NEAR SWELLENDAM IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE

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## ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME: APPENDIX I SOIL MANAGEMENT PLAN

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## **SOIL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **1. PURPOSE**

Some of the most significant impacts on soil properties occur as a result of activities associated with construction. Construction activity can have adverse impacts on soil in a number of ways by:

- » Covering soil with impermeable materials, effectively sealing it and resulting in significant detrimental impacts on soils' physical, chemical and biological properties, including drainage characteristics.
- » Contaminating soil as a result of accidental spillage or the use of chemicals.
- » Over-compacting soil through the use of heavy machinery or the storage of construction materials.
- » Reducing soil quality, for example by mixing topsoil with subsoil.
- » Wasting soil by mixing it with construction waste or contaminated materials, which then have to be treated before reuse or even disposed of at landfill as a last resort.

Careful management of topsoil and subsoil is an important aspect of sustainable use of materials that are being stripped. Without a proper Soil Resource Plan there is the risk of losing, damaging or contaminating valuable soil resources. The purpose of this Soil Management Plan is to outline principles for soil management to ensure the integrity of the resource during and post-construction. This plan should be read together with the Emergency Response Plan in order to minimise the risk of contamination of soils.

### **2. SOIL HORIZONS**

#### **Topsoil**

Topsoil is the top-most soil layer (0-25 cm) in undisturbed areas, however it should be noted that the majority of the site for the wind farm is farmland and no impacts are expected in undisturbed areas. If no impacts are expected in undisturbed areas then the principals that follow do not apply. The principals are also applicable to any undisturbed areas affected by the power line. This soil layer is important as it contains nutrients, organic material, seeds, communities of micro-organisms, fungi and soil fauna. All the contents of the topsoil layer are necessary for soil processes such as nutrient cycling, and support growth of new plants. The biologically active upper layer of soil is fundamental in the development of soils and the sustainability of the entire ecosystem. Fungi, algae, cyanobacteria and non-vascular plants form a 'living crust' on the soil surface that influences the retention of resources (principally nutrients and water), as well as reducing the potential for soil erosion.

In general, the greatest concentration of seeds (i.e. up to 90% of the seedbank) is found in the top 5-10 cm of topsoil. Soil nutrients and other biological elements also have a higher concentration in the top 5 – 10 cm of soil, but can occur up to 25 cm.

### **Subsoil**

Subsoil is soil generally deeper than 25 cm. The subsoil contains lower levels of nutrients, but the soil texture is still suitable for plant growth.

### **Overburden**

Overburden is all the soil below the subsoil layer, generally characterised by a fine soil texture which is sometimes high in clay and salt content which makes plant growth difficult. Such soils comprise a sterile growth medium, devoid of nutrients, and depending on the clay content, are of high salinity and often phytotoxic. Even shallow-lying overburden soils are largely depleted of nutrients. These soils constitute an unsuitable medium for the establishment of plants.

## **3. PRINCIPLES FOR SOIL MANAGEMENT**

### **3.1. The correct handling of topsoil**

- » Before beginning work on site, topsoil should be stripped from all areas that will be disturbed by construction activities. Appropriate equipment must be used and appropriate work practices must be implemented for soil stripping as mishandling soil can have an adverse effect on its properties.
- » Topsoil should be stripped in the driest condition possible.
- » Topsoil must be retained on site in order to be used in site rehabilitation. The correct handling of the topsoil layer is in most cases the key to rehabilitation success.
- » It is important that the correct depth of topsoil is excavated in order to ensure good plant growth. If excavation is too shallow, then an important growth medium for new seedlings could be lost. If excavation is too deep, this could lead to the dilution of the seed and nutrient rich topsoil with deeper sterile soil.
- » Topsoil and subsoil layers must never be mixed. The mixture of topsoil with the deeper sterile soil hinders the germination of seeds which are buried too deep in the soil layer. Mixture of soil layers also leads to the dilution of nutrient levels which are at highest concentration within the topsoil, resulting in lower levels of nutrients available for new seedlings.
- » To enable soil to be reused on site at a later stage, it needs to be stored in temporary stockpiles to minimise any damage or loss of function. Stockpiles should not be higher than 2m. Alternatively topsoil berms can be created on

the site boundaries. There are a number of important considerations when creating stockpiles - including soil erosion, pollution to watercourses and the risk of flooding. These will be affected by the size, height and method of forming stockpiles, and how they are protected and maintained.

- » Topsoil must be stored separately from other soil in heaps until construction in an area is complete.
- » The duration of topsoil storage should be minimised as far as possible. Storing topsoil for long periods leads to seed bank depletion following germination during storage, and anoxic conditions develop inside large stockpile heaps.
- » All stockpiles must be positioned away from drainage lines.
- » Sediment fencing should be erected downslope of all stockpiles to intercept any sediment and upslope runoff should be diverted away from stockpiles.

### **3.2. Stripping of Subsoil**

The following protocols must be followed when stripping subsoil:

- » On many sites subsoil will not need to be stripped but merely protected from damage. However, on other sites it might need to be temporarily removed. Where subsoil is required to be stripped, this should be undertaken before commencement of construction from all areas that are to be disturbed by construction activities or driven over by vehicles.
- » Subsoil stripping depths depend on the correct identification of the sub-soil types on an ad-hoc basis, where no formal survey data exists.
- » Subsoil should be stripped in the driest condition possible.
- » To enable soil to be reused on site at a later stage, it needs to be stored in temporary stockpiles to minimise any damage or loss of function. There are a number of important considerations when creating stockpiles - including soil erosion, pollution to watercourses and the risk of flooding. These will be affected by the size, height and method of forming stockpiles, and how they are protected and maintained.
- » All stockpiles must be positioned away from drainage lines.
- » Sediment fencing should be erected downslope of all stockpiles to intercept any sediment and upslope runoff should be diverted away from stockpiles.