

## Voorspoed as production at mine ramps up

The Voorspoed mine owned by De Beers plans to ramp up production by 30% to 800,000 carats over the next 12 years, the mine's general manager, Mpumi Zikalala, said last week.



Voorspoed is one of three operations De Beers has in the country. The open-cast kimberlite mine near Kroonstad in the Free State is forecast to produce 600,000 carats this year, said Zikalala.

The mine would increase production to 750,000 carats next year and 800,000 carats in the following year.

The growth will come from a combination of factors including new equipment, improved roads and the extraction of different parts of the pit according to a mine plan schedule.

Zikalala said De Beers spent R180m buying two new shovels and five new haul trucks, which would boost the tonnages hauled from the pit to the processing plant.

The expense and work incurred this year would be enough for the 150m deep mine to increase production to 800,000 carats by 2014.

Further, Voorspoed management would look at ways of optimising not only the mining side of the business but the processing of ore. Efficiencies had already improved by 12%.

Mining operations at the site began in 1906 and continued, under the Voorspoed Diamond Mining Company until 1912 when it was bought by De Beers. In 2003, De Beers reassessed the deposits at the site and using new technology was able to again start mining diamonds there.

The R1.3bn mine was opened in 2008 and by the end of last year it had produced almost two million carats.

According to the mine's mineral resources manager, PJ Jordaan, there were at least 11 other kimberlite deposits and dykes in the region, but only Voorspoed and JSE-listed DiamondCorp's Lace mine were economically viable.

De Beers is expanding the pit with cuts - a process that involves pushing the edges of the pit outwards to gain access to deeper levels of the ore body.

Zikalala said three cuts had already been put into the mine and the company is considering a fourth cut. Otherwise it will start underground mining at the site.

Voorspoed is a marginal mine because of the mix of high-value coloured diamonds and low-quality ones but the mine's commercial manager Dinesh Bhana said about 60% of the mine's revenue is derived from the high quality stones, which constitute about 10% of the diamonds produced.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

