

WWF jumps into Oakbay fray

The [saga](#) of Oakbay Investments continues with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) South Africa expressing its concerns about claims that money held in trust for mine rehabilitation was diverted and used for other purpose as suggested in the affidavit submitted by the minister of finance, Pravin Gordhan.

The affidavit suggests that funds that were held in trust by Optimum Mines, specifically for mine rehabilitation, may have been released for purposes other than restoring environmental damage. This would amount to an unacceptably deleterious outcome to human wellbeing, the organisation says.



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CEO of WWF South Africa, Dr Morné du Plessis, said: “I have requested an urgent meeting with Minister Mosebenzi Zwane to discuss the measures that his ministry and the department of mineral resources have in place to ensure that we will never face a situation as implied in the court documents, namely that even one cent of funds set aside (by law) for rectifying environmental damage of mining activity be diverted to any use other than for what it was intended.”

He adds: “WWF will leave no stone unturned to ensure that human wellbeing is protected from the long-term degradation that may result from the extraction of mineral resources from our South African soil.”

By their very nature mining operations have a devastating impact on the environment. More than this aspect are the consequences of such damage to the livelihoods and the wellbeing of communities in the vicinity of mines.

Many of the specific impacts of mining usually relate to a reduction in the quality of water sources and land around such sites, with concomitant impacts on human and animal health, and the consequent deterioration in human wellbeing and the destruction of livelihoods.

It is for this reason that companies are required by law to set aside money for rehabilitation. However, research published in a 2012 WWF report indicates that mining companies are not fulfilling this obligation adequately. Furthermore, a joint report by the department and the Council for Geoscience in 2015 estimates that rehabilitating South Africa's derelict and owner-less mines and treating polluted water from these operations will cost almost R60bn.

Recognising the urgent need to ensure that further liability is not transferred to the state and by extension society at large, new and more onerous financial provisioning requirements were introduced in 2015 and are now governed by the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA).

Importantly this now makes provision for the rehabilitation of long-term impacts, particularly water related impacts, such as acid mine drainage associated with coal and gold mining, that may only become apparent in years to come. Such funds (either in the form of a financial guarantee or which are deposited into a specific accounted administered by the minister or the department) must be held for the specific purpose of environmental rehabilitation after mine closure.

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