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Parties sign Vele colliery biodiversity offset agreement

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VERMEULEN

BY: ANINE

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Photo by Duane Daws
Vele colliery

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The Department of [Environmental Affairs \(DEA\)](#), South African National Parks ([SANParks](#)) and [Coal of Africa Limited \(CoAL\)](#) on Wednesday signed a historic biodiversity offset agreement (BOA) for [CoAL's Vele colliery](#), in Limpopo.

The biodiversity offset was aimed at strengthening cooperation between the three parties towards the conservation and sustainable development of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape (MCL) World Heritage Site. The colliery was located near the Mapungubwe national park.

It was also aimed at maintaining the integrity of the site and ensuring that the negative impacts of development were avoided, reduced or remedied in the pursuit of sustainable development, as well as promoting the development of the MCL so that it benefits the [environment](#), the local economy and resident communities.

SANParks acting CEO Dr [Nomvuselelo Songelwa](#) said the signing of the BOA

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He added that, in terms of the BOA, a steering committee would be established representing the three parties, which would provide an oversight function for the implementation of the agreement.

“Three thematic areas to ensure that financial support to the MCL is derived from this agreement have been established. These include biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage management and tourism development, with an understanding that the implementation of these projects in this regard would contribute to the development of the MCL and the stimulation of the local economy,” he explained.

In the absence of a legislative framework for biodiversity offsets in the South African mining industry, extensive research, based on international best practice, was conducted by the three parties to develop a biodiversity offset strategy that would protect the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the MCL.

CoAL CEO **David Brown** explained that the process began with the signing of a memorandum of agreement (MoA) in September 2011 to protect and maintain the integrity of the OUV of the MCL.

“The signing of this agreement bears testimony to the commitment of the representatives of our respective organisations. We are acutely aware of the need to balance the mining development at Vele to stimulate and enable economic growth and also the significance of preserving the world heritage site,” he said.

DEA acting deputy director general **Judy Beaumont** noted that the signing of the MoA “shattered the myth [that] perceived economic developments and environmental protection [are] at odds with each other”.

“It is possible that South Africa can create jobs and derive benefit from natural resources, while protecting and conserving the environment for future generations,” she said.

Beaumont added that South Africa’s biodiversity was worth R73-billion, contributing 7% to the country’s gross domestic product.

“South Africa’s mineral endowment implies that mining and the environment will continue to interact and we need to walk this road together to achieve prosperity in a sustainable way,” she stated. ■■

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