

An environmental manifesto for the greater Pietermaritzburg area

Developed by the Greater Pietermaritzburg
Environmental Coalition

Introduction

The Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) proposal to mine a portion of the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia marked a turning point in public awareness of the impact of development on the environment in South Africa. Prior to this, a few development proposals had prompted some debate, some had even been the subject of environmental impact assessments, but none had stimulated such widespread public interest. This seems curious in a country where the 'Great Outdoors' is a key marketing resource and commonly considered to contribute much to a South African ethos. Even stranger is the level of environmental degradation that seems acceptable in the name of development. Ironically, the sometimes acrimonious debate over the mining proposal followed the release into the public domain of an environmental impact study commissioned by RBM. As bitter as the debate occasionally was, we should welcome such public involvement. It is good that people recognise they have a right to hold and express opinions on particular issues; such pressure influences decision-makers and forces critical evaluation of development projects. We get the environment we deserve.

The RBM mining proposal had secondary benefits. First, it brought unfamiliar terms such as 'environmental impact assessment', 'integrated environmental management' and 'interested and affected parties' firmly into common language, even if many had a limited understanding of their exact meaning. The consultative process implicit in these terms is empowering. Secondly, the final environmental impact assessment¹, completed more than three years after the process started, thrust upon the broader public a holistic understanding of the concept of environment. The public should no longer view 'environment' as referring to the natural world only: the Environment Conservation Act (No. 73 of 1989) defines environment as 'the aggregate of surrounding objects, conditions and influences that influence the life and habits of man or any other organism or collection of organisms'. Such

influences may have 'biophysical, social, economic, historical, cultural and political aspects'². Thus, for example, the RBM assessment dealt with land claim issues alongside components of the natural environment. The same understanding of environment guided the manifesto drafted by the Greater Pietermaritzburg Environmental Coalition.

In Pietermaritzburg, well known for its colonial architecture, the cultural and historical environment has benefited from the sensitive and appropriate re-utilisation of older structures. Such re-use allows for the appropriation of historic space by modern communities, and thus its conservation: Tembaletu Community Centre provides an excellent example, as do Victorian and Edwardian buildings occupied by professional firms. Not all is good in the city, however. Some developers display a general disregard for the planning application process and for building regulations, resulting in the loss of important buildings (see, for example, *The Natal Witness* 7 September 1998). Others simply fail to appreciate the significance of the historic landscape. For many years the Oxenhams building on the corner of Burger Street and Commercial Road constituted an important part of the streetscape and provided residents with a powerful sense of place. With the coming of McDonalds, Pietermaritzburg was treated to the bizarre spectacle of the National Monuments Council and KwaZulu Monuments Council (KMC) at loggerheads over the future of the site. The KMC tried to stimulate a public call to save the building, but the effort failed, sinking in a widespread public apathy for environmental issues. It is a tasteless irony that the world's oldest McDonalds is now eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places in the United States. In it, employees celebrate the restaurant chain's heritage by wearing 1950s period dress and serving food from the original menu. Built in 1953, this 'historic place' is considerably younger than Oxenhams was³. Ironic too, is that Pietermaritzburg has acquired yet another colonial structure, this time a symbol of the modern economic power of the United States. We get the environment we deserve.

Democracy in South Africa has seen great efforts to raise the standard of living of disadvantaged communities. This has resulted in a development imperative, which is now placing enormous pressure on the environment and which threatens to cause irreparable damage unless negative impacts can be mitigated as much as possible. Prior to the restructuring of local government in 1995, environmental issues of relevance to Pietermaritzburg were referred by the municipal administration to the City Council's Environmental Committee. This committee was an advisory committee and had no plenary powers, the limits of its ability being to make recommendations to the various municipal departments and standing committees. It was composed of representatives from a range of civic organisations and environmental interest groups as well as organisations with an involvement or expertise in the environmental sector, together with representation from the City Council.

Although effective in some respects, the Environmental Committee was frequently sidelined, and its members frustrated by their evident ineffectiveness. Things came to a head in mid-1993 when the committee was presented with a number of *faits accomplis*. One of us (D. H.) questioned the value and efficacy of the committee, suggesting that some form of re-evaluation was needed.



The built environment, like the natural environment, is a source of tension between the demands of development and those of preservation. Legislation now prevents summary demolitions. (Picture: *The Natal Witness*)

At this time it was also evident that existing local government structures had a limited life-expectancy and that the government and administration of the city was likely to undergo dramatic changes at all levels. Councillor Haswell (Environmental Committee chairman) observed that there was little point in the committee restructuring itself under the existing regime. Instead, he suggested, the energies of committee members would be better utilised in trying to raise the profile of environmental issues during the local government restructuring process, such that adequate environmental provisions be made in the new structures. Consequently, concerned members of the environment committee met to discuss possible options for the future, with a view to opening the debate to the broader community.

Further discussions among concerned environmentalists took place in September 1993, focusing on the shifting political balance in the light of the local government negotiations and how best to place environmental issues firmly on the agenda of new structures. A series of meetings culminated in a public meeting on 11 October 1993 at the Natal Museum, where a range of organisations and individuals concerned with different aspects of the environment committed themselves to forming a short-term coalition. This became the Greater Pietermaritzburg Environmental Coalition (GPEC). Two priorities were identified:—

1. the need for information regarding local government processes.
2. the need to choose effective strategies to advance environmental concerns.

A steering committee for GPEC was nominated at the meeting⁴ and this group met a number of times to plan subsequent workshops. The first of these, held at the end of October, at Tembaletu Community Centre, focused on information sharing

and included input from outside experts. Another took place on 18 November to determine strategies. As a result, three working groups were formed to take the following identified tasks forward:

- develop an Environmental Manifesto
- select an environmental candidate for the new Transitional Local Council
- lobby the selection committee for environmental representation on the new Transitional Local Council.

In this article we consider only the Environmental Manifesto as this represents a tangible entity reflective of the efforts of GPEC at this time. We believe also that it is a valuable document, which embodies principles that remain pertinent to local environmental issues.

Unfortunately, the coalition's attempts to have an environmental candidate elected to the Transitional Local Council failed and this latter body has not subsequently seen fit to establish a new environmental advisory or watchdog structure to replace the now defunct Environmental Committee (although there are currently moves to establish a Local Agenda 21 Committee following the 1992 Environmental Summit in Rio de Janeiro). The new local government structure has thus not formally adopted the GPEC Environmental Manifesto, and there is consequently a risk that this valuable document will disappear into obscurity in the filing cabinets of municipal officialdom. *For this reason we feel it is important that the document be formally published, as a historical record both of the activities of the GPEC and of the environmental issues considered to be of importance by concerned environmentalists of this time.*

The manifesto was drawn up during the course of a series of workshops coordinated by GPEC committee members Mark Butler and Anne Harley in the last two months of 1993 and the first quarter of 1994. The document was accepted in principle by the then still extant Environmental Committee and was presented to the Local Government Negotiating Forum in April 1994. To our knowledge, this was the first document of this nature produced by civil society in South Africa. It is a draft manifesto in the sense that it is a statement tabled by environmentalists, and has not yet been discussed with other interest groups.

Acknowledgment

We are grateful to Mrs V. Ward who typed the Manifesto for this publication.

NOTES

1. CSIR Environmental Services, 1993. Environmental Impact Assessment. Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia (Kingsa/Tojan Lease Area). Volume 3. Environmental Impact Report.
2. Department of Environment Affairs, 1992. *Glossary of terms used in Integrated Environmental Management*. p4.
3. See: <http://www.downeyca.org/mcdon.htm>
4. The committee members were Mark Butler (Earthlife Africa), Andrew Hall (National Monuments Council), Anne Harley (Earthlife Africa), Dai Herbert (Natal Museum), Muna Lakhani (Eco-shop/Professional Services) and Gavin Whitelaw (Natal Museum).

DAI HERBERT
GAVIN WHITELAW

Draft Environmental Manifesto for Greater Pietermaritzburg

Introduction to the manifesto

- i) The Manifesto is aimed at guiding future local government policy and development practice in the greater Pietermaritzburg area, with the goal of sustainable development and maximum environmental quality.
- ii) This is an environmentalists' statement of principles that we believe are vital for the future of the city. It must be understood that this does not imply a 'take it or leave it' attitude for those who may not accept it *in toto* – all of us anticipate that we will need to lobby and negotiate with a wide range of interest groups.
- iii) The underlying approach has been to keep the implicit definition of 'environment' as wide as possible in order to ensure that the Coalition would continue to hold together. While this has meant that some have wondered about the 'environmental' nature of some of the issues included, there is no doubt that the approach has yielded a remarkably rich and comprehensive Manifesto.
- iv) The statements relating to health were included only after discussion with members of the Health Committee of the Local Government Negotiating Forum who felt that, since no parallel process was likely from the health sector in the immediate future, it was best to include a section in our Manifesto.
- v) There are no examples nor suggested strategies to achieve the principles being stated. We felt that the inclusion of strategies was:
 - a) neither appropriate nor feasible in a concise statement of principles, and;
 - b) a effective way to limit the scope of the stated principle.

Rather, the Manifesto focuses on the principles that we believe should guide the search for solutions in an environmentally sound and sustainable direction.

Preamble

This Environmental Manifesto outlines the basic principles which should guide local government policy and development practice in the greater Pietermaritzburg area, with the goal of sustainable development and maximum environmental quality. These principles reflect a commitment to social and economic equality and justice, gender sensitivity, environmental sustainability, and a development approach which first and foremost addresses the interests of the poor and the marginalised, and of future generations and, in so doing, releases the full potential of our city. The Manifesto argues that policy makers should take into account the impact of economic growth on the environment, and on the distribution of resources and opportunities, in planning future development.

In pursuing these goals, the following rights and principles will be enjoyed by all the people of Pietermaritzburg and guaranteed and enforced by local government.

- the right to know (i.e. free access to information);

- the right to be informed (i.e. a duty on the part of authorities and developers to alert the public and affected parties of potential environmental impacts);
- the 'precautionary principle' (i.e. as long as the health and environmental impacts of an existing or proposed development, process or pollutant are unknown or uncertain, these will be considered to be dangerous. The onus and the cost of proving no danger to health and environment will rest with the party producing or using, or proposing to produce or use, such developments, processes and pollutants);
- that environmental management shift from damage control to the prevention thereof;
- the principle of the 'polluter pays' (i.e. the cost of rehabilitation following environmental degradation shall be borne by the party responsible for that impact and not by the public);
- that costing and auditing will include environmental costs;
- that provision of services will be costed so as to encourage the minimising of environmental impact, and to reward consumers who use less resources and penalise heavy users;
- the principle of optimising meaningful and gainful employment opportunities.

The exercise and furtherance of these rights and principles is best served by local government processes and institutions which are accountable to democratic processes. These processes and institutions should allow for full, active and effective participation by communities in decision-making, and mutual responsibility for implementation of such decisions.

This should be supported by a strong institutional framework at metropolitan level which should have at least the following elements:

- an effective and independent environmental ombudsbody;
- a strong legislative framework;
- a requirement that all development will be subject to IEM principles and procedures, and in particular will include effective participation by all affected communities, groups and interest parties.

Land use

Inappropriate and uncontrolled land uses are a major cause of environmental degradation and depletion of resources. In striving to maintain a healthy and sustainable environment, and enhancing Pietermaritzburg's unique and special sense of place, the local authority should:

- adopt an environmentally sensitive, healthy, sustainable and functionally integrated approach to land use planning and development;
- adopt a holistic and integrated approach to planning and development;
- incorporate Integrated Environmental Management procedures formally within the metropolitan bylaws;
- promote environmental protection and stewardship as important values;

- promote the functional integration of "natural open spaces" and the greening of the city;
- broaden the assessment criteria, procedures and techniques used in land use planning to include environmental factors and sustainability considerations;
- ensure the provision of basic services and infrastructures;
- encourage the adoption of appropriate and affordable technology;
- ensure that the planning of all roads is subject to a full Environmental Impact Assessment, which includes public participation.

Where appropriate, natural, historical and cultural resources shall be developed for the purposes of educational enrichment and the promotion of tourism.

Natural environment

Aspects of afforestation, water management, waste disposal and transport provision have the potential to impact heavily on the natural environment and must be planned and managed sensitively.

It is important to ensure that the diversity of life forms and biological processes in greater Pietermaritzburg are protected. The protection of fauna and flora should be regulated by management guidelines aimed at ensuring viable indigenous populations and wise use of natural resources. The encroachment of alien invasive plants and animals should be controlled utilising environmentally sensitive methods.

Cultural and Historical Environment

- The authorities should strive to ensure respect, proper management and protection of all sites of cultural and historical significance within greater Pietermaritzburg. Effective representative structures should be established to accomplish this.
- The identification and recording of sites of historical and cultural significance should be encouraged in order to enhance community pride. Such sites should reflect the diversity of historical and cultural interests of all communities within the metropolitan area, as well as the diversity of the historical past.
- A range of incentives should be devised to encourage developers and property owners to conserve our historical and cultural heritage.
- The restoration of sites of historical and cultural significance should be done in such a way as to upgrade skills and promote job creation.
- Appropriate conservation areas should be established to promote and preserve our heritage, and to enhance the character of the city and metropolitan area. This would contribute to creating an acceptable living environment.

Afforestation

The replacement of indigenous vegetation and agricultural land in greater Pietermaritzburg with a monoculture such as commercial afforestation is unacceptable. Furthermore, the afforestation permit system must be reviewed. The broader issues of sustainable development, paper provision, recycling and wood processing plants also need to be addressed.

Afforestation has multiple biophysical and socioeconomic impacts, and in planning afforestation projects it is imperative that IEM is adopted, and that the following issues are included in the assessment:

- Biophysical: erosion potential, water quality and catchment management, pollution, vegetation and flora, use of invasive species, wildlife conservation, fire protection and veld burning, use of herbicides and pesticides.
- Socio-economic: land use patterns, impacts on communities, housing and staff matters, provision of infrastructure, visual impacts, waste, economic and employment consideration.

Where forestry is deemed to be an appropriate land use, the ‘Guidelines for the application practices in productions forestry’ edited by R. C. Bigalke shall be used as the minimum management standard.

Waste policy

The primary goal shall be the avoidance of the creation of waste and a reduction in its quantity and harmfulness, before any consideration of the re-use, re-cycling or disposal thereof. The precautionary principle shall apply in any consideration of possible impact of waste production, processing and disposal on people and the environment.

Waste reduction

The principle of ‘polluter pays’ shall be accompanied by a strict waste prevention programme which shall consider the further possibilities of the use of clean technology and product substitution in achieving waste reduction. Those who produce less waste should be rewarded through an incentive scheme.

Re-use and recycling

Re-use and recycling must be encouraged through legislation and education. Recycling of industrial waste shall be strictly controlled and audited. The precautionary principle shall apply.

Waste disposal

The management practices of incineration and land filling create new problems themselves, and are not long term solutions. Landfill sites will only be established after participatory, accountable and transparent consultation with all interested and affected parties. Pietermaritzburg will aim for the elimination of hazardous waste production, and the strict control of hazardous waste disposal. No hazardous waste dumps or incinerators will be located in the greater Pietermaritzburg area, in order to discourage toxic industries from locating in the city.

Air policy

Everyone has the right to clean air. Air pollution is a public health, aesthetic and environmental issue, and since air is shared, polluting our air pollutes the air of those around us. We must:

- reduce overall emissions and toxic materials and eradicate ozone depletants;

- be guided by the principle that assumes all emissions to be harmful and requires polluters and potential polluters to prove otherwise;
- decrease vehicular traffic in the city centre;
- encourage only clean industries and aid existing industry to cut emissions, but 'the polluter pays' principle must apply to those who pollute;
- ensure that air quality is maintained within the working environment;
- nurture and expand the city's 'green lung'.

There must be ongoing transparent monitoring of air quality.

Transport policy

Recognising that the majority of people in the Pietermaritzburg metropolitan area do not have access to private vehicles; transport policy should favour

- (i) public transport (buses, taxis, railways, trams) and
- (ii) fuel free mobility (cycling, pedestrianisation) above the private car.

Transport policy should:

- ensure accountability so that people have control over what is provided;
- ensure comprehensive transport planning;
- provide funds for long-term planning;
- promote coordinated, accessible and affordable public transport as a social service satisfying a basic need in the Pietermaritzburg metropolitan area;
- promote road safety;
- ensure safe transport particularly for women and children (especially late at night and on isolated routes);
- include planning that will identify transport options for greater Pietermaritzburg that are sustainable and will minimise emissions pollution.

Water policy

All the people of greater Pietermaritzburg should have access to water which is clean, close by, affordable and sufficient for drinking, cooking and cleaning. The local authority should promote the sustainable use of water through:

- promoting efficient use of water and minimising wastage;
- promoting water conservation using a variety of creative approaches;
- using a participatory approach to planning for water needs of communities, especially involving women who are traditionally the water managers;
- investigating aspects such as catchment and wetlands management and afforestation, which impact on water supplies;
- preventing pollution and contamination of water, and acting against those who pollute or contaminate;
- environmentally sensitive water provision.

An Environmental Impact Assessment must be carried out for any development proposal that requires the canalisation of a stream or river, altering of a stream or river course, or the modification of stream or river banks.

Energy policy

All the people of greater Pietermaritzburg should have equal access to electrification. The local authority should reduce its current dependence on energy provided by fossil fuels which are non-renewable and contribute to global warming, and instead encourage improved efficiency with respect to energy use and the conversion to alternative, cleaner and sustainable forms of energy. The use of nuclear energy should be discouraged vehemently. There will be no nuclear installation within greater Pietermaritzburg. The use of human energy/labour intensive production methods should be encouraged.

Working environment

Bearing in mind the right of workers to a clean and safe working environment, we must strive to balance worker security and environmental protection by asserting that:

- the rights to know and be informed about health and environmental aspects of the workplace and its environs shall be enjoyed by all interested and affected parties;
- the precautionary principle shall apply where the possible health or environmental impact of an enterprise is uncertain;
- employers shall be strictly liable for the impact of an enterprise on the environment and the health of employees.

The introduction of environment-friendly alternative processes will be encouraged provided that workers are fully and effectively consulted to minimise job losses and maximise appropriate re-skilling and training.

Noise, shock and vibration

Noise pollution has a direct effect on stress levels and quality of life, and may have an insidious effect on the psychological well-being of people and animals. The local authority should:

- encourage the reduction of noise, shock and vibration to appropriate levels;
- ensure that noise, shock and vibration levels are acceptable in terms of physiological and psychological effects;
- ensure protection from noise, shock and vibration, particularly for vulnerable sectors of the community.

Health

We should aim for 'health for all' through;

- respecting the rights of all to a clean, safe and healthy environment;
- emphasising preventive rather than curative health-care, and moving away from high-tech, capital intensive medicine which provides expensive services to a small wealthy minority;
- providing publicly funded and supported basic health-care provision, infrastructure development and training, and in particular:

- prioritising community-based, and community controlled, primary health-care with a special emphasis on the health needs of vulnerable sectors of society;
- recognising and incorporating traditional and alternative health-carers and birth attenders;
- training and community health-workers who themselves can train others in aspects of primary health-care, including the identification of health-related environmental hazards.

HIV/AIDS Policy

The role of HIV/AIDS as a major threat to the social, economic and environmental well-being of all the people of South Africa needs to be recognised, and positive steps made to halt its progress and mitigate against its impacts.

HIV/AIDS is driven by social and economic factors, which make some individuals more vulnerable to infection. Development which

- improves health facilities;
- improves literacy and income;
- improves people's social and economic conditions;
- reduces dependence on practices such as migration and prostitution;

will reduce transmission of the disease and policies which take account of the likely effects of the disease can reduce the impact.

Improvement of the social and economic status of women generally is a prerequisite for increasing their ability to protect themselves and their children from the epidemic.

Individuals from the following organisations and institutions participated in the GPEC process:

Afrikaanse Sakekamer ; Association for Rural Advancement; Black Sash; Botanical Society of Southern Africa; Built Environment Support Group; City Health Division; City Parks & Recreation Department; City Residents & Ratepayers Association; Combined Residents & Ratepayers Association; Concerned Citizens Association; CROW; Deanery Lane; Earthlife Africa (Pietermaritzburg); EBSem. SA; Echo; ECO-Shop; Environmental Justice Networking Forum; River Action Campaign; Farmers' Support Group; Geography Department UN(P); Greater Edendale Environmental Network; Hilton Furniture Restorers; Institute of Architecture Heritage Committee; Institute of Natural Resources; Lawyers for Human Rights; Leighton Street Action Group; Natal Bird Club; Natal Co-operative Timber; Natal Museum; Natal Parks Board; Natal Provincial Museum Services; National Monuments Council Natal Regional Office; PACSA; Pietermaritzburg Canoe Club; Pietermaritzburg Girl's High School; Pietermaritzburg Publicity Association; Pietermaritzburg Ramblers Association; Pietermaritzburg Society; Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce & Industries; P-MOSS; SCAR; South African Archaeological Society (Natal Branch); South African Institute of Forestry; Tembaletu Community Centre; Town Bush Valley Association; Umgeni Valley Project; Umgeni Water; Urban Design Unit; Wildlife Society of Southern Africa.