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MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY INTO MINING

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Mainstreaming biodiversity into the mining sector was the subject of a training workshop recently attended by over 100 people. The workshop focused on the Mining and Biodiversity Guideline, as the primary tool to guide how biodiversity issues should be mainstreamed into the mining sector. The Mining and Biodiversity Guideline is planned to be launched on 22 May, this year's Biodiversity Day. The event was one of a number of the SANBI Grasslands Mining Programme's pre-launch training events to ensure a good understanding of the guidelines exists amongst all role players.

The Mining and Biodiversity Guideline provides a tool to facilitate the sustainable development of South Africa's mineral resources in a way that enables regulators, industry and practitioners to minimise the impact of mining on the country's biodiversity and ecosystem services. It provides the mining sector with a practical, user-friendly manual for integrating biodiversity considerations into the planning processes. The training examined how biodiversity issues should be incorporated into mining from the earliest stage in the mining cycle when reconnaissance and prospecting are being undertaken, through detailed mine planning, operations and eventually rehabilitation and closure. Following this approach ensures not only that mining's impact on biodiversity is minimized, but also that mining does not incur unnecessary risk and cost in dealing with biodiversity issues. It is from this business perspective that the Guideline explains the value for mining companies of adopting a risk-based approach to managing biodiversity. The early identification and assessment of mining impacts on biodiversity provides an opportunity to put in place environmental management plans and actions that reduce risks to biodiversity, people and business.

The training examined the key requirement of robust spatial planning to identify, and where possible, completely avoid areas of highest biodiversity value such as wetlands and water production areas. The training emphasized that where important biodiversity cannot be completely avoided, that careful design and planning is necessary to minimize impacts, and that mines need to be carefully operated, rehabilitated to an agreed end state (e.g. grazing land), and any residual impacts need to be offset.

Over 100 people attended from mining companies (including most of the big international companies as well as some medium and smaller companies), Chamber of Mnes, officials from the Departments of Environmental Affairs, Mineral Resources, and Water Affairs, NGOs, as well as a large number of consultants involved in the mining industry. The event was hosted by De Beers under the auspices of the South African Mining and Biodiversity Forum (which is a body of the Chamber of Mnes) and the SANBI Grasslands Programme, in conjunction with the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Department of Mineral Resources.

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