

Why is Mantashe so hell bent on mining at Xolobeni?

By  [Nicci Botha](#)

18 Jan 2019

It seems that a High Court judgement in favour of Amadiba Crisis Committee (ACC) and Xolobeni community over mining rights on their land is not good enough for Mineral Resources Minister, Gwede Mantashe. He now wants an independent survey to determine whether the locals really don't want Australian mining house, Mineral Commodities Resources (MCR), to come in and extract titanium out of the dunes.



Damage caused to the coastline by Tormin mining operations. Photo: GroundUp

Shortly after Mantashe's second visit to the community [erupted in chaos](#), the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) issued a [statement](#) saying that the survey is in line with one of the outcomes of the court judgment of the High Court in North Gauteng last year, which called for thorough consultation with the Xolobeni community prior to any granting of a mining right.



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"On the basis of the outcomes of the survey, we will then take a firm decision on the way forward," Mantashe said in the statement.

If the community says no, there will be no mining. If the community says yes, mining will proceed. "Whichever right-owner is granted the licence to mine must also adhere strictly to the provisions in the MPRDA and Mining Charter, including implementation of social and labour plans," the statement continued.

However, as the ACC says in a statement issued the day before Mantashe's visit, surely the fact that 68 of 74 homesteads in the area joined the litigation against DMR points to the community's feelings on the mining issue?

Back story

History speaks for itself. Communities have generally come off worse in South Africa's mining story. Hence, the inclusion

of social and labour plans (SLPs) when mining companies apply for a mining right with the DMR. The document lays out what community projects the company will undertake to improve the lives of the people who live there. It's a form of social and restorative justice.

Oxfam South Africa released a [report](#) to coincide with the Xolobeni judgement in November illustrating that in many instances an SLP is literally not worth the paper it is written on.

The report relates the impact of mining operations by Tormin had on small community of the Matzikama on the Cape west coast when the company breached the conditions of its mining licence. Tormin is a subsidiary of MRC (yes, the same company seeking mineral rights in Xolobeni) it commenced mined minerals, including zircon and magnetite, in 2015. Within three years of operation, the mine had breached that 15km boundary to the point where a 17 metre cliff below it collapsed.

“Given that hundreds of mines operate in South Africa (there are nearly 300 in the North West province alone), the potential for Social and Labour Plans [SLPs] to begin to address some of the socio-economic challenges that communities living near mines face, is obviously significant. But are they doing so? Sadly, evidence collected so far by a number of research institutions strongly suggests that they are not,” Oxfam said in its report.

No wonder the ACC is fighting tooth and nail to preserve its way of life. But it still doesn't answer the question of why Mantashe is pushing so hard on the Xolobeni issue.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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