



DEPARTMENT: WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Strategic Environmental Assessment

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for Water Use in the Usutu-Mhlathuze Water Management Area (WMA)

Background to the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Despite the fact of its scarcity and growing demand therefore - water, as a natural resource, is expected to fulfil people's needs in all parts of the country. It must therefore be used carefully in order to enhance economic growth, without ruining the rivers and the natural environment which we live in.

In the past, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) has made all the decisions about how water should be distributed to different users such as farming, mining or industry. The new National Water Act now makes provision for people living in an area to take part in these decision-making processes. The Act has brought about the establishment of 19 Water Management Areas (WMAs). One such Water Management Area (WMA) is the Usutu-Mhlathuze. In the near future, each WMA will be managed by a Catchment Management Agency (CMA).

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA) is a tool that will assist people make the best decisions regarding water use in a WMA. In this process the environment is 'assessed' to see what it can offer to development and whether development will harm the environment. Information is collected on social, economical and biophysical status of each WMA to assist in the decision-making process.

Some of the questions raised during an SEA process can be summarised as follows:

- "What are the opportunities and constraints for development?"
- "What water is available?"
- "If development takes place what will it mean for the people and environment?"
- "How will development effect the economy at WMA and national scale?"
- "Is this the best way to use the water?"
- "Who else needs the water?"
- "What are the costs to other users of water or the land?"

The SEA also gathers and evaluates information by :

- Looking at opportunities and constraints of water use, development etc.
- Weighing up costs and benefits.
- Asking people what they believe should happen.
- Studying the social, ecological and economic situation.
- Sharing information and ideas with everyone.

A 'project' in the Usutu-Mhlathuze

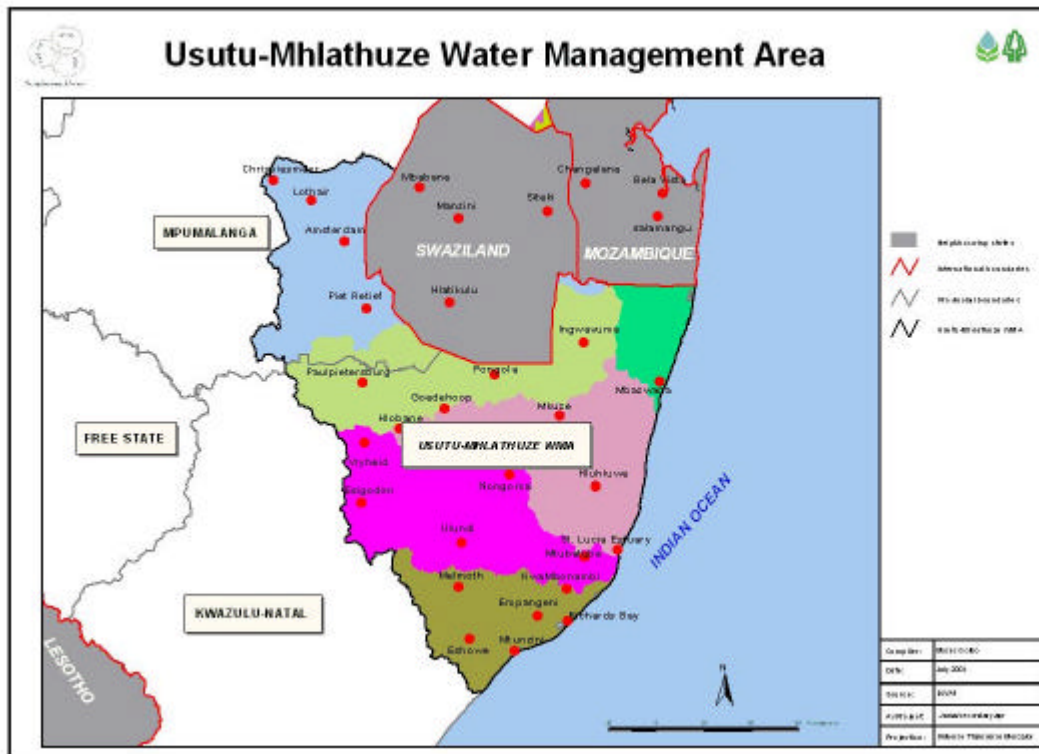
DWAF is currently conducting a SEA study in the Usutu to Mhlathuze Water Management Area (see map below). This study is funded by DWAF and the British Department for International Development (DFID). The study commenced in October 2000 and is expected to be completed in March 2002.

A SEA pilot study has already been completed in the Mhlathuze Secondary Catchment. In this study it has been found that:

- The Mhlathuze catchment is water stressed and there isn't any surplus water for allocation to new users.
- A Biobase (a coverage that identifies areas of importance in terms of conservation and endangered/rare species) was also developed

- There has been lack of local communities' representation at decision-making Forums and Committees. There is a need to get people face to face about their different needs, demands and visions.
- There is a historical inequity in terms of allocation of water resources between the established commercial sectors and the community.

Map illustrating the Usutu-Mhlathuze Water Management Area



Three research studies have been commissioned by the SEA on social, hydro-economic and biophysical issues of the Usutu to Mhlathuze WMA.

- Social component: aims to paint a social picture by evaluating water related and non-water related issues and to ensure stakeholder participation.
- Biophysical component: aims to achieve an accurate description of the natural environment in the WMA by looking at the physical environment potential and biodiversity of the WMA. This involves the development of a Biobase for the WMA and creation of Biophysical Land Use Potential maps using the Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- Hydro-Economic component: aims to offer information which will allow decision-makers to weight hydrological and economic impacts using the Decision Support System (DSS).

The information that is gathered by the SEA in this study will be stored as useful maps, computer data, and ideas in terms of reports. Instructions on where and how to use the information will be available for future use.

Different stakeholders have been identified for the study. These include:

- DWA national and regional offices
- Private sector: forestry, mining, agriculture including sugar
- Government/public sector: national and provincial government departments, provincial and local government institutions (metro, district councils and municipalities), traditional authorities

- Parastatals: Water Boards, Irrigation Boards, Water Users Associations

As part of the social study, Public Participation workshops will be held in the Ingwavuma, Mbazwana, Nongoma, Mtubatuba, Piet Retief, Pongola and Vryheid areas. The main aim of these workshops will be find out from the more about the water related issues and issues that stakeholders feel are SEA related. Secondly, giving local communities a chance to participate in the SEA process and the decision-making process.

Please join us in creating this new way of sharing information and in deciding our futures together.

Should you require more information please contact:

Harrison Pienaar (Project Co-ordinator):

Tel: 012 336 8238
Cell: 082 804 3149
Email: pienaarh@dwaf.pwv.gov.za

Brian Mthembu (Social Co-ordinator):

Tel: 012 336 7496
Cell: 082 679 9841
Email: mthembub@dwaf.pwv.gov.za

Steve Horak (Biophysical information):

Tel: 012 336 7665
Cell: 082 331 4993
Email: horaks@dwaf.pwv.gov.za

Dirk Versfeld (Hydro-economic information):

Tel: 021 424 1787
Cell: 082 377 4084
Email: dirki@iafrica.com

Or visit our website at

<http://www-dwaf.pwv.gov.za/sfra>