



m&e case study

Establishing guidelines for golf course developments

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The development of guidelines for golf course development improved regulation by:

- **providing guidance on appropriate location of these developments.**
- **identifying key impacts which should be mitigated.**

One of the objectives of the C.A.P.E. partnership is to support research and the development of tools which will inform policy and implementation.

The Western Cape has a growing number of golf courses, and polo and riding estates. They are promoted as potential drivers of the local economy, creating significant numbers of direct and indirect jobs, both in the development and maintenance phases.

From an environmental perspective golf courses have a significant impact on the landscape. They transform large areas and place substantial demands on local water supplies. Polluted run-off can have a negative impact on the quality of local water. In terms of planning impact, they often establish new gated villages which reduce accessibility.

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) was concerned about the cumulative impact of these estates, particularly as there appeared to be a rapid increase in their number. In 2005 there were applications for 35 new golf and polo estates, 12 of which were to be sited along the Garden Route. At that point in time there were already 83 golf courses in the Western Cape, 20 of which were located along the Garden Route.

UNDERSTANDING IMPACTS

In 2004 a rapid review was commissioned to determine the impact of both the existing and also the proposed golf estates and polo fields. This review was based on a questionnaire which was sent out to all existing golf estates and also on additional independent research, which examined the economic impact of these developments.

Responses were obtained from most of the major role-players and a good understanding of the impact of golf estates was developed:

- Each golf course uses about 1-2 million cubic metres of water per day to irrigate greens and supply the needs of an adjacent golf housing estate. The Western Cape catchments are already stressed as a result of high abstraction, so this impact raised the greatest concern. It was recognized that the impact of additional demands on the local water supply must be very carefully evaluated before approval of any new developments.
- Polluted run-off, resulting from the use of fertilizers, herbicides or the utilization of treated sewerage for irrigation, is another concern, particularly in natural systems which are adapted to operate under low nutrient conditions.
- In terms of footprint, the review indicated that the average 18 hole residential estate covers 70-80ha, while a 9 hole course within a city covers about 20ha. This use of space is of particular concern when it results in the conversion of prime agricultural land or the loss of endangered vegetation.
- Economic impacts were difficult to determine, and it was recommended that an economic model for the development and maintenance phases of an average golf course be developed to assist the authorities in evaluating the actual contribution to a local economy.

The C.A.P.E. partnership assisted in this rapid review by coordinating the inputs from the biodiversity sector. This resulted in a strong and unified contribution which had a significant influence on the final outcome.

DEVELOPMENT OF GUIDELINES

The insights from the rapid review were used in the development of the Provincial Spatial

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Development Framework. This was further supported by spatial biodiversity information provided by C.A.P.E. partners.

The issues and best practice requirements raised by the rapid review were also used as the basis for the development of guidelines for the evaluation of applications under the planning regulations of LUPO¹ and the environmental regulations of NEMA²².

The guidelines highlight the need for professionals undertaking EIAs to be objective and to ensure that participation processes are accessible. They also make explicit recommendations in terms of location within the context of bioregional planning:

- Golf estates should be used to define the urban edge, or as green spaces within the urban area.
- They should not be located in core biodiversity protection areas.
- If located in buffer zones they should not result in the creation of new nodes of urban development.
- The design of a course needs to take into consideration the mitigation of impacts, including those on biodiversity and water resources.
- Banks should only finance approved applications and unapproved developments should not be advertised.
- The guidelines also outline the responsibilities of the decision-making authorities.

IMPACT ON DECISION MAKING

The presence of the guidelines has an influence on decision making but this is difficult to quantify. Developers can now assess their potential proposal against the guidelines, and may not even submit a proposal which they feel is unlikely to succeed. There has been a marked decrease in the number of applications for new golf courses in the Western Cape, but it is impossible to determine to what extent this is caused by the existence of the guidelines. However, in the Eastern Cape there has been an apparent increase in the number of golf estate proposals. It may be that developers are transferring to a location where they feel they have a greater likelihood of success, but this cannot be conclusively demonstrated.

The guidelines have provided a framework against which assessment of proposals for golf course development can be made. This has already resulted in greater consistency in decision making. The norms have been clearly spelled out, and the onus now rests on the developer to motivate for the approval of any deviation from these norms.

Date: April 2009

Key Words:

golf course, golf course estate, polo field, water abstraction, cumulative impacts

1 LUPO. Land Use Planning ordinance no 15 of 1985

2 NEMA. National Environmental Management Act no 107 of 1998