

Response from Chris Brown – 12.10.2020

Dear Bertchen,

Thank you for your e-mail with Statement and Press Release on the above subject. I am sharing my response with all NCE Members and friends, in response to the fact that you have widely distributed the attached documents.

I have spent some time familiarising myself with this initiative. I wish to advise you to proceed very carefully on this and not to align yourself and Earthlife with this populist opposition to what may well be a very good initiative for Namibia. As concerned environmental organisations and individuals it is our job to carefully weigh up the pros and cons of all potential developments and resource-use initiatives and come to a conclusion as to whether it is good for Namibia, her environment, people and economy, or whether it has a nett negative impact. We cannot object to everything linked to development and resource use, or else we would all have to go back to living in caves. And we would have no credibility – particularly when a project has predominantly positive attributes. I would also encourage you not to be influenced by someone in Germany who's ultimate intentions may not be transparent and /or aligned with Namibia's best environmental interests.

I want to share the follow key bullet points with you:

1. This initiative is at a very early stage of investigation, discussion and negotiations. If things come together, then the process would kick off probably only from 2025. The project is currently in feasibility phase, where the technical, environmental, social, and economic aspects are still being scrutinised by both the Namibian and German counterparts.
2. A Namibian delegation visited Germany, comprising government, respected environmental NGO, the charcoal association and others to discuss opportunities. They also met the German Ministry of Environment. After in depth discussions and follow-ups, these parties don't share your concerns (perhaps because they have more in-depth insight into the project specifics than what is currently being portrayed in the recent press release).
3. The city of Hamburg wishes to exit from using coal (much imported from South Africa) for carbon reasons. They are looking at options. The most obvious option is gas, from Russia. For geo-political reasons this is awkward. It would be worth looking at whether opponents to the Namibia biomass option have any direct or indirect interests in the gas or coal sector, or whether they have any better solutions for transitioning from coal?
4. The Namibia biomass option would probably be by means of bush pellets, transported within country by rail. This would help restore degraded rangeland, add value to the bush (in line with Vision 2030), create jobs and bring in foreign currency.
5. Much of the information in the Statement and Press Release is unfounded, based on wrong assumptions and factually incorrect – it seems to be aimed at stirring up public populist sentiments amongst the uninformed.
6. For example, the concerns about land use change – this would be predominantly beneficial – thinning out the bush and improving Namibia's rangelands. If this initiative went ahead, it would have to adhere to the highest international sustainability criteria, which is partly why Namibia has chosen to discuss this opportunity with Germany, and not other less-environmentally inclined countries.
7. Another example is that of claimed job losses. Jobs would actually be created. The bush initiative does not conflict or compete with the charcoal sector. First, there is an abundance of

bush biomass. Second, the charcoal jobs are unskilled, while the biomass jobs would be semi-skilled and skilled. Third, the ultimate markets are not in competition - one industry does not undermine the opportunities of the other. This initiative is opening an entirely new value chain.

8. An important aspect to consider is the carbon footprint of the bush biomass when it reaches Germany. It may surprise you to learn that specific carbon assessments for the project show that it is actually carbon negative. It is thus immediately 100%+ better than both the existing coal and the natural gas which it is being compared to.

In summary, this initiative could have environmental benefits for our rangelands in Namibia, create jobs, bring in foreign currency, open up a new value chain and help address climate change. As such, the Namibian Chamber of Environment will not support the statement or the press release that you have circulated, and indeed we will share our views to help redress the misinformation that you are circulating. I would ask you to very carefully reconsider aligning Earthlife with this populist, perhaps self-serving mis-information that aims to undermining a potentially good initiative for Namibia. We need to let the feasibility study run its course and then we will all be in a far better position to understand what is proposed, and its costs and benefits. A public discussion for interested people to learn the facts would indeed be useful.

Kind regards,
Chris

Sent: Monday, 12 October 2020 14:44

To: Christopher Brown

Cc: Bertchen Kohrs

Subject: Biomass to Hamburg???

Dear Chris,

Please receive a joint statement and press release speaking out against the export of biomass to Hamburg, Germany.

I would be pleased if you distribute it amongst NCE member and further. We can hopefully motivate a public discussion on this topic.

Thanks and regards,
Bertchen