



# Site Sensitivity Verification Report

## Proposed Rehabilitation of Watercourses of Farms 15/37 and RE/37, Grootplaat, Aurora

PREPARED IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS  
OF THE EIA REGULATIONS, 2014 (AS AMENDED) AND  
THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT ACT,  
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Screening Tool and Protocols for Assessment

The Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries on 5 July 2019 promulgated regulations requiring the compulsory submission of a report generated by the national web based environmental screening tool, when submitting applications for environment authorisation (GN 960 of 2019). The screening tool generates a report based on mapping of environmental sensitivities and on proximity to other features such as defence installations and civil aviation installations. On 20 March 2020, the Minister published Procedures for the Assessment and Minimum Criteria for Reporting on Identified Environmental Themes in terms of sections 24(5)(a) and (h) and 44 of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (GN 320 of 2020). These Procedures prescribe the general requirements for undertaking site sensitivity verification and for protocols for the assessment and minimum report content requirements of environmental impacts for specific environmental themes identified by the screening tool. Further Protocols were gazetted on 30 October 2020 for terrestrial plant and animal species assessment in GN 1150 of 2020.

## 1.2 Sensitivity Verification

Each set of specialist protocols provides for a Site Sensitivity Verification to be undertaken by an Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) or suitable specialist, prior to commencing with specialist assessment and reporting on the identified themes. The purpose of a site sensitivity verification is to confirm the current use of the land and potential environmental sensitivity of the site, and to compare these with the sensitivity mapped or identified by the screening tool. The outcome of the verification must be recorded in the form of a site sensitivity verification report (**this report**) that is submitted together with the application for environmental authorisation and confirms or disputes the environmental sensitivities mapped by the screening tool. The purpose of the site sensitivity verification is to confirm the actual state of the site as compared with that what has been identified by the screening tool. The site sensitivity verification is intended to confirm or refute the need to undertake specialist studies as identified in the screening report.

This report is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Protocols as published in terms of GN 320 of 2020 and GN 1150 of 2020. It has been prepared by a registered EAP (Jeremy Rose of Infinity Environmental, EAP Reg No: 2019/1116) based on a desktop analysis, site inspections, and other available information.

## 1.3 Methodology

The site sensitivity verification was undertaken by the EAP and verification included the following:

- » Discussions with the project rehabilitation specialists;
- » Site visits undertaken in April 2026; and
- » Desktop review including:
  - Satellite imagery using Google Earth Pro, including imagery from 2000 to present,
  - SANBI Ecosystem Critical Biodiversity Areas, and
  - The National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas.

This report presents the outcomes of the site sensitivity verification as described above.

## 2 SITE LOCATION AND LAND USES

Grootplaat is located on Farm 15/37 and the remainder RE/37 near Aurora within the Bergrivier Municipality, Western Cape. The property extends across approximately 2 146 ha and is situated within the upper catchment of the Kuiders River system.

The site is a high plateau historically used for agriculture, with a valley-bottom watercourse and various associated habitats. The property has been subject to historical agricultural activities, hydrological modification and associated infrastructure development. Over time, these activities, together with the proliferation of invasive alien plant vegetation, altered hydrological processes, drainage modifications, channelisation, erosion and sedimentation, have resulted in prolonged degradation of watercourses and their associated freshwater ecosystems, which reduced the hydrological connectivity, ecological functioning of these aquatic system.

The proposed site is located within a predominantly rural and natural environment with limited existing infrastructure including residential units and workshops. Apart from existing gravel roads, small farm buildings and in channel dams, the property remains largely characterised by natural to semi-natural ecosystems including fynbos vegetation, wetlands, riparian area and open agricultural land. The proposed rehabilitation activities will take place in previously disturbed areas and watercourses within a natural and agricultural environment.

## 3 NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCREENING TOOL SENSITIVITIES FOR THE SITE

The procedures for the Assessment and Minimum Report Content Requirements for Environmental Themes (GN 320 of 2020 and GN 1150 of 2020) came into effect on 09 May 2020 and 30 October 2020. In terms of the Protocols, the themes below require a site sensitivity verification by the EAP, followed by specialist assessments for those sensitivities confirmed by the EAP. The National Environmental Screening Tool Report (generated at <https://screening.environment.gov.za/>) identifies the following mapped environmental sensitivities for the subject sites:

**Table 1: Summary of sensitivity themes**

| Theme                                       | Sensitivity |      |        |     |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------|------|--------|-----|
|                                             | Very High   | High | Medium | Low |
| <b>Agriculture</b>                          |             |      | X      |     |
| <b>Animal species</b>                       |             | X    |        |     |
| <b>Aquatic biodiversity</b>                 | X           |      |        |     |
| <b>Archaeological and cultural heritage</b> |             | X    |        |     |
| <b>Civil aviation</b>                       |             | X    |        |     |
| <b>Defence</b>                              |             |      |        | X   |
| <b>Palaeontology</b>                        |             | X    |        |     |
| <b>Plant species</b>                        |             |      | X      |     |
| <b>Terrestrial biodiversity</b>             |             |      |        | X   |

Other specialist studies unrelated to the identified themes but listed in the Screening Tool Report, included:

- » Landscape/Visual impact Assessment,
- » Hydrology Assessment and
- » Socio-Economic Assessment.

In terms of the Protocols, the themes above require a site sensitivity verification followed by specialist assessments of confirmed sensitivities. The sections below provide an overview of the verified site sensitivity.

### 3.1 Agriculture Theme

The screening tool maps a **Medium Sensitivity** rating for the agriculture theme based on Very Low, Low, and Low-Moderate land capability ratings in the national Land Capability dataset.

The sensitivity rating assigned is considered appropriate and is supported by the findings of the site assessment, which found that the site has been intensively cultivated to the detriment of soil conservation and future agricultural potential. Sensitivity has as much to do with the nature of the activities proposed as it does with the receiving environment. The proposal assessed in this application is for the **rehabilitation** of the site, which will not impact negatively on any agricultural resources and should instead contribute to improved soil conservation, reduced erosion, and increased water supply and quality.



Given the nature of the proposed activities, **an agricultural assessment or compliance statement is not required.**

### 3.2 Animal Species Theme

The site was found to have a **High Sensitivity** for the animal species theme and was justified from the identification of the high and medium sensitivity species below:

#### 3.2.1 High Sensitivity Species

**Circus maurus (Black harrier) EN:** This species is South Africa's rarest endemic raptor with fewer than 1000 mature breeding birds left in the population (Birdlife, 2026). The primary threat to the Black Harrier is habitat fragmentation through agricultural activity. In the Western Cape, the Black Harrier is most abundant in coastal and montane fynbos (CAR birdmap, 2026). Known breeding areas falls within the west coast, includes Koeberg Nature Reserve, West Coast National Park, Jackalsfontein Nature Reserve, Patanoster Nature Reserve, through Elandsbay to Groen Rivier, Spoeg Rivier, and Bitter Rivier (Black Harrier Conservation Action Plan, 2025).

Records on iNaturalist show that the closest sighting of the Black Harrier occurred approximately 40km away from the site in Piketberg in 2020 with another sighting recorded in Porterville in 2025, approximately 56km from the site. The site has not been identified as a breeding area for the species. The activities proposed do not involve development or the expansion of cultivation but rather the rehabilitation of existing impacted areas. The proposed rehabilitation will not result in negative impacts on the Black Harrier.

***Aquila verreauxii* (Verreaux's Eagle) VU:** This species occurs throughout Africa, although restricted to mountainous areas (Birdlife, 2026). This species are solitary nesters that build nests on rocky outcrops or cliffs. The Verreaux's Eagle has been observed in and around the site (iNaturalist, 2026). The main threat to this species is wind turbines and electrocution by poorly insulated powerlines. The proposed rehabilitation of watercourses will not negatively impact the Verreaux's Eagle.

### 3.2.2 Medium Sensitivity

***Sagittarius serpentarius* (Secretarybird) VU:** This species favours savanna, open woodland, grassland, dry floodplains, and Karoo shrubland habitats. iNaturalist records indicate that the Secretarybird has been recorded in the broader Piketberg area, including sightings at Sauer and Goedverwacht in 2018, Goegap Landskroon in 2022 and 2023, and Het Kruis in 2026. Population declines in this species have been linked to an increasing human footprint however, the proposed rehabilitation will not extend the footprint of the existing site. The likelihood of this species occurring in the immediate vicinity of the site, or being negatively affected by the proposed rehabilitation activities, is therefore considered negligible.

***Pachysoma aesculapius* (Scarab beetle) VU:** The dung beetle forms part of the scarab family. It is categorised as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Davis, 2013) mainly due to urban expansion and habitat loss. Its preferred habitat are coastal sands on the southwestern edge of the Western Cape Province. According to the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), this species was observed and recorded in surrounding areas including Veldrift, Rodelinghuys, Dwarskerbos, Elandsbay and Citrusdal. The rehabilitation project does not include the expansion or removal of natural habitat and will make use of existing transformed land for cultivation. It is not anticipated that this species would be negatively affected by this development.

***Brinckiella aptera* (Mute winter katydid) VU:** This species is endemic to the Northern and Western Cape Provinces and occurs in the Fynbos and Succulent karoo biomes (SANBI, 2026). The main threats faced by this species is habitat loss due to cultivation with annual crops, overgrazing, urban development and invasion by alien species (SANBI, 2026). Records on the GBIF database indicates that this katydid was recorded in Clanwilliam and Vanrhysdorp approximately 63 and 120km away from the site respectively. The likelihood of this species occurring in the immediate vicinity of the site, or being negatively affected by the proposed rehabilitation activities, is considered negligible.

***Aneuryphymus montanus* (Yellow-winged agile grasshopper) VU:** The Yellow-winged Agile Grasshopper is endemic to the Cape region of South Africa (Hochkirch, Bazelet & Danielczak, 2018). It is classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List mainly because of its habitat being transformed into farmland and invasions of non-native plant species. It is associated with fynbos vegetation and prefer south-facing cool slopes (Kinvig, 2005). It is not expected that the proposed rehabilitation will negatively impact this species.



Sensitivity has as much to do with the nature of the activities proposed as it does with the receiving environment. The proposal assessed in this application is for the **rehabilitation** of the site, which will not impact negatively on any fauna. The site sensitivity verification therefore **disputes** the Screening Tool rating of High Sensitivity for the animal species theme. No standalone assessment or compliance statement is required.

### 3.3 Aquatic Biodiversity Theme

The site was mapped as **Very High Sensitivity** due to the site's location within an Aquatic Ecological Support Area, and the presence of the Kuilders River system and associated wetland seeps. The proposed project seeks to restore and enhance the hydrological functioning, ecological integrity and increase the resilience of the landscape through targeted rehabilitation interventions. Therefore, the negative impacts on aquatic biodiversity are expected to be limited.



The site sensitivity verification report **confirms** the sensitivity rating assigned by the Screening Tool report. An aquatic impact assessment was undertaken by Dr. Liz Day of Liz Day Consulting.

### 3.4 Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Theme

The site was mapped as **High sensitivity** due to the site being within 150m of a Grade IIIa Heritage site (likely the known cave paintings near the site). The rehabilitation activities will be confined to the Kuilders River and associated wetlands ecosystems and no impacts on heritage resources are anticipated. Excavations activities are limited in extent and are not expected to compromise the integrity of archaeological or cultural heritage resources. The activities do not comprise any of the activities specified in the National Heritage Resources Act as requiring authorisations or permitting.



The site sensitivity verification therefore **disputes** the Screening Tool's High sensitivity rating for the proposed rehabilitation, and no assessment or compliance statement will be undertaken.

### 3.5 Civil Aviation Theme

The site was mapped as **High** sensitivity due to the site being in a restricted airspace associated with the Langebaanweg military flying area. No impacts on this airspace will occur as the proposal does not include any structures or obstacles.



Although the site is within restricted airspace, no impacts are anticipated and no specialist assessment or compliance statement for civil aviation is required.

### 3.6 Defence Theme

The site was mapped as **Low sensitivity** for the defence theme in the Screening Tool Report. As mentioned previously, the proposed activities will not include erecting structures above the height of existing structures in the area.



Although the site is considered to have Low Sensitivity for the defence theme, the Screening Tool did not identify the defence theme for an impact assessment. As recommended, no specialist assessment or compliance statement for defence is required.

### 3.7 Relative Paleontology Theme

The site was identified as having **High Sensitivity** due to features with 'high' palaeontological sensitivity in the surrounding area. The screening tool does not provide metadata explaining this classification. The planned activities will not require extensive excavation and it is therefore highly

unlikely that any fossilized remains or traces of animals or plants from the geological past will be found on the site during these activities.



The site sensitivity verification **disputes** the Screening Tool rating of for the relative palaeontological theme. No relative paleontological impact assessment or compliance statement will be undertaken.

### 3.8 Plant Species Theme

The site was mapped with a **Medium Sensitivity** rating due to the presence of 20 medium sensitivity plant species of conversation concern. The rehabilitation activities involving vegetation clearing, soil disturbance, revegetation and removal of invasive plant species may affect indigenous plant communities if not properly managed.



This site sensitivity verification **confirms** the Screening Tool rating of medium sensitivity for the plant species theme. A botanical assessment will be undertaken by Nick Helme of Nick Helme Botanical Surveys.

### 3.9 Terrestrial Biodiversity

The site was mapped as having a **Low Sensitivity** rating due to the presence of low sensitivity vegetation types.



The site sensitivity verification report **confirms** the Low sensitivity rating for terrestrial biodiversity theme. A terrestrial compliance statement will be prepared by Nick Helme of Nick Helme Botanical Surveys.

## 3.10 Other Studies Identified in the Screening Tool Report

### 3.10.1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The proposed rehabilitation activities are intended to rehabilitate degraded watercourses and wetlands and are not expected to result in negative visual impacts. The rehabilitation is anticipated to improve the natural landscape character of the area.



The activities are limited to rehabilitation and will not result in visual impacts.

### 3.10.2 Hydrological Assessment

A hydrological assessment was identified by the screening tool report. The rehabilitation activities will take place within and adjacent to the Kuilders Stream and associated wetland systems.



The assessment will include an aquatic assessment addressing hydrological aspects. The assessment will be undertaken by Dr Liz Day of Liz day Consulting.

### 3.10.3 Socio-economic Impact Assessment

The proposed activities will not influence the surrounding socio-economic environment as the activities will take place on private land and will not involve significance construction.



The site sensitivities verification disputes the requirement for a socio-economic assessment or compliance statement.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This site sensitivity verification report is intended to confirm or refute the sensitivity of the proposed site and thus the need to employ specialists. The specialist reports will be submitted as a part of the EIA process pursuant to the application for environmental authorisation.

Based on the findings of the site sensitivity verification report, it is confirmed that the site has aquatic, and botanical sensitivities requiring further assessment. This site sensitivity verification confirms that no further specialist studies apart from those discussed above are required to undertake the proposed activities at the site.

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