

Hannah Lidgett, MPL
DA KZN
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Dear MEC Zondi,

RE: URGENT INTERVENTION REQUIRED TO ADDRESS RAMPANT ILLEGAL SAND MINING ACROSS KWAZULU-NATAL

I write in my capacity as a Portfolio Committee Member on Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs to raise serious concern regarding the escalating crisis of illegal sand mining taking place across KwaZulu-Natal and to request your immediate intervention.

Illegal sand mining has developed into a highly lucrative criminal enterprise, with reports indicating that truckloads of sand are being sold for up to R5 000 per load. These operations are conducted without environmental authorisation or tax compliance and strongly suggest the involvement of organised syndicates operating throughout the province.

Oversight inspections have been conducted at the Valley of a Thousand Hills as well as at multiple sites along the Umhlanga River, where severe and ongoing environmental degradation has been observed.

In the Valley of a Thousand Hills, entire hillsides are being levelled, creating dangerously unstable terrain. This poses a significant risk of landslides during periods of heavy rainfall and threatens the safety of nearby communities. The destruction is also negatively impacting tourism establishments, as the natural landscapes that attract visitors are being systematically destroyed.

At the Umhlanga River, riverbanks are being excavated openly, and in some instances, mining is taking place directly within the riverbed. Portions of the river have been dammed, diverted and obstructed, significantly increasing the risk of flash flooding for downstream communities.

Following these developments, the national Portfolio Committee on Mineral Resources and Energy, together with regional officials, conducted an inspection and committed to intervene at both sites. Regrettably, no meaningful action has since materialised.

Repeated efforts to secure accountability have been met with departments shifting responsibility between one another. Despite assurances that enforcement teams would be deployed, illegal activities continue unabated.

KwaZulu-Natal is being environmentally stripped at an alarming rate, placing communities, ecosystems and the tourism economy at risk while criminal operators continue to profit substantially. If allowed unchecked, I fear that the scale of illegal sand mining will escalate to an irreversible situation.

I therefore request your office to please coordinate an urgent multi-departmental intervention involving Environmental Affairs, Mineral Resources, SAPS and relevant municipalities to:

- Immediately halt all illegal sand mining activities at identified sites
- Deploy enforcement teams to secure affected areas
- Conduct environmental impact assessments and implement rehabilitation plans
- Investigate and dismantle organised syndicates involved in these operations
- Ensure criminal prosecution of those responsible

Given the gravity of the situation and the continued inaction to date, I trust that your office will treat this matter with the urgency it demands and provide clarity on the concrete steps that will be taken.

Yours sincerely,

Hannah Lidgett, MPL

Portfolio Committee Member: Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs

KwaZulu-Natal Legislature