

# Anthracite mine 'fatally flawed'

**T**HE proposed "Fuleni" anthracite mine targeted for establishment on the south-eastern border of the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve in Zululand has been confronted by the largest collection of environmental and conservation NGO groupings established in KwaZulu-Natal to oppose it.

On top of this, preliminary community-inspired and specialist academic investigation of Ibutho Coal's draft Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA) has delivered withering criticisms, describing it as "fatally flawed".

The outrage greeting the location and potentially destructive impact of this proposed 32-year anthracite mine has been demonstrated by the coalescing of eight NGOs (and numerous international voices) under the banner of ICWA; the iMfolozi Community and Wilderness Alliance.

ICWA comprises the active support of the Global Environmental Trust (Get), ground-Work, African Conservation Trust, Wessa, the Wildlands Trust, the Wilderness Leadership School, the Magqubu Ntombela Foundation and Mining Affected Communities United in Action.

"We have a local, national and international support base commensurate in voice, passion and capability with all those that fought the St Lucia sand mining proposal back in the 1980s. The difference here is that a huge number of the local Fuleni community are vehemently opposed to it too – and their numbers are growing as they learn the true picture of this mine's location and the devastation it will cause them," said ICWA campaign director, Sheila Berry.

Berry said no one should be under any illusion as to the "catastrophic impact" this mine's location would have, both on community welfare and lifestyles as well as the greater Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, including the collapse of the Wilderness status of the iMfolozi.

"In every respect, this coal mine represents the very worst of so-called development proposals.

"The mining company's draft EIA, drawn up for legitimising the mine's operation, has already been debunked by

NGOs oppose operation planned on border of Hluhluwe/iMfolozi Park, writes **Richard Compton**



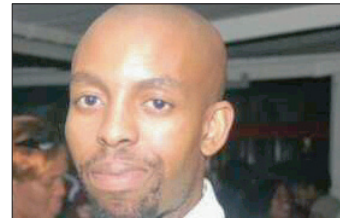
KIRSTEN YOUNENS



SHEILA BERRY



ROGER PORTER



SIFISO DLADLA

a whole host of professionals who have undertaken preliminary studies and responses to their report."

ICWA's legal representative, Kirsten Youens, submitted 70 pages of comments on the draft EIA to the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs.

"The overwhelming conclusion is not only that the document is fatally flawed and entirely unacceptable, but that the project as a whole should be rejected," Youens said.

These studies, she said, demonstrated that the mining company, Ibutho Coal, had not addressed a vast number of fundamental considerations in advancing the social, environmental, economic and financial consequences of the mine's operation.

Speaking on behalf of one of ICWA's NGO members, scientist Roger Porter of the Get said as things stood, the Fuleni mine posed one of the "most monumental threats" to people and bio-diversity in KwaZulu-Natal's history.

"As a scientist I approach matters thoroughly and factually. This mining proposal appears as nothing short of a ruse; to the Fuleni communities as well as the tourism, eco-tourism and sustainable agricultural economies of the

region. It is truly alarming how little insight the mining company has brought to bear on the many irreversible and irreparable consequences this mine will cause to our environment," he said.

Typifying this "casual and carefree" attitude, Porter spoke of Ibutho Coal conceding that the Wilderness status of iMfolozi would be destroyed: "As if this admission wasn't enough they instead talk of buying up a few pieces of land elsewhere and for conservation to offset or provide an alternative Wilderness area. It's quite staggering that this option is floated, bearing in mind the historical and cultural heritage of this untouched and internationally-protected natural area; a place of national bio-diversity importance."

The impact of seismic vibrations from mine blasting on black rhino breeding, elephant stress levels and the abandonment of nests of Red Data birds, to name only a few, Porter said was so severe that it threatened the entire southern Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park ecosystem.

In addition, the influx of outside or foreign workers and the additional traffic, posed an increase in poaching.

In a repetition of the Lake St Lucia campaign, Ibutho Coal was also placing a "wholly

unsubstantiated" emphasis on the number of jobs to be created.

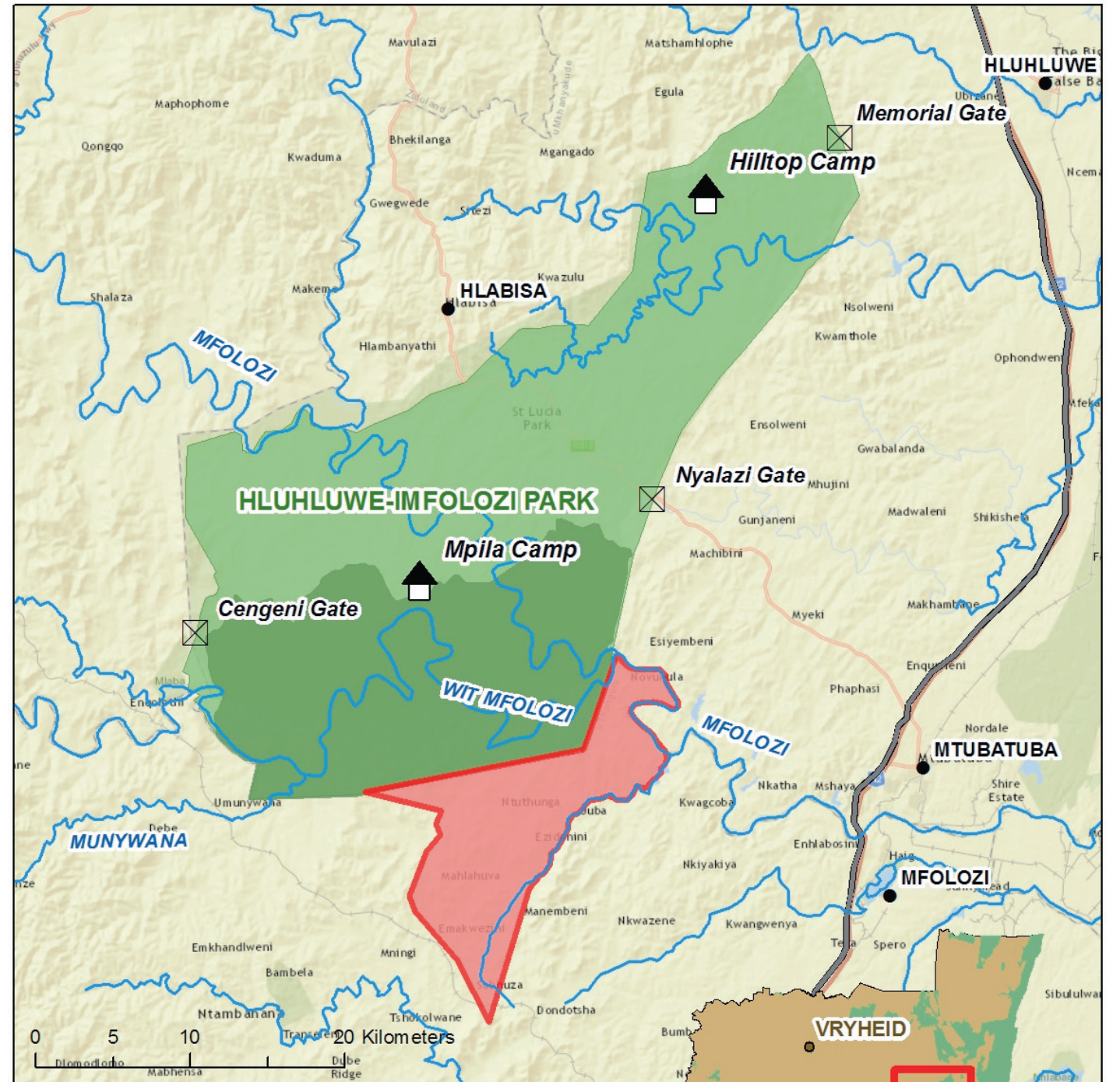
He was reminded of the promises mining houses made to provide 190 jobs during the sand mining operation on the Lake St Lucia sand dunes: "Well, we proved then that not only was their figure flawed in both numbers and the longevity of this work, but that it paled against what conservation/tourism would offer in enduring and sustainable employment. This turned out to be some 400 at that time. I can assure you the same scenario will apply here."

Porter described Ibutho Coal's claim of establishing 334 jobs as equally "fanciful".

"Fourteen of these are described as skilled/supervisors and 320 'core' skills. There is nothing to support that the money they say they will invest will create anything like this many unskilled, or even semi-skilled jobs. Besides which, the workforce will most likely comprise a high proportion of skilled workers who are likely to be imported than recruited locally. We believe the mine would create at most a maximum of 216 mainly low-skilled jobs.

"It is enough to say that because of its location next to the fence line of the iMfolozi Wilderness buffer area, the seismic vibrations, visual/noise/water pollution, infestation of alien plants, dust and scarcity of water will be appalling to both people and the wildlife of the area. The impact the mine will have on tourism, eco-tourism and 'Sense of Place' will be irreversible in its damage. It will definitively undermine the very thing thousands of people come to experience in this protected area, which after all has held this status for the past 110 years."

ICWA's Sifiso Dladla, commenting on the communities perspective, said opposition was growing as people became more and more familiar with the "hollow and broken promises" of other mining opera-



**Legend**

- Towns
- ⊠ Gates
- ▲ Camps
- Rivers
- National roads
- Proposed Fuleni Anthracite Project
- Wilderness Area
- Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

0 5 10 20 Kilometers



## Unassuming medical student a trove of talents

**ZOHRA MOHAMED TEKE**

HE'S 22 and ranked among South Africa's top achievers, having matriculated with 12 distinctions.

He is now a fourth-year University of KwaZulu-Natal medical student and is simultaneously completing a Master's degree.

If that's not talented enough, student extraordinaire Kumeren Govender also plays several musical instruments.

"I was always an inquisitive child, but also a naughty one," said Govender, who grew up in Shalcross, near Chatsworth.

"I used to damage appliances at home, like the video machine, just to understand how they worked."

On hearing of his remarkable academic pursuits, a nerd is what one would expect. A Bill Gates type. But Govender is far from it, if first impressions are solid.

He comes across as an ordinary young man, comfortable, but with not a whiff of arrogance about him.

Despite his extraordinary achievements, his eyes immediately light up when he hears his interviewer speaks Turkish. He does too and is excited to exchange a few words, having learnt it at his former school, Star College in Westville.

"School is where it all began for me. As a school of excellence in mathematics and science, the teachers primed me not only for academic excellence but for life.

"It is there where my vision of the world expanded through

numerous international Olympiad studies and dedicated teachers who enabled me to achieve 12 distinctions in matric," he explained.

While he is now a leading medical student, medicine was not his first choice: "I always had dreams of becoming an engineer and added medicine to the bottom of my application list to appease my grandmother."

"One month prior to the start of university, I received a call from UKZN offering me a scholarship to study medicine. After careful deliberation, I decided to try out medicine, thinking I could always get back into engineering."

Govender excelled academically, maintaining a distinction for every course at university, and received the Vice-Chancellor's Award as one of the top five in the medical faculty.

And as the accolades grew, the university soon grasped the talent in their midst, and more academic opportunities came knocking.

"While at medical school I joined the Centre for Aids Programme of Research in South Africa (Caprisa) where my enthusiasm for research grew.

"I was offered an opportunity to be the pilot student in the Medical Partnership Initiative dual-degree programme," he said.

"I was reluctant at first, in fear of jeopardising my aca-

demical career, but I soon realised that this was a method to fast-track my research capabilities and establish myself as a young researcher at a much earlier age. It would also allow me to synergise my engineering ambitions with medical research skills," he said.

And while many students would juggle university life with their social activities, Govender's talents have already caught the attention of international academics.

Armed with sharp research skills, Govender counts his presentation of an HIV research paper to an international delegation of scientists in 2013 among his most memorable moments.

Not surprising – his audience included Francoise Barre-Sinoussi, acclaimed Nobel laureate and co-discoverer of the HI-virus.

He laughs off an observation about genius, waving his hands in a no-no gesture, saying he sees himself as a normal guy.

But normal 22-year-olds don't do what he does, he is told. A response is awaited. He agrees, and credits it to his upbringing.

"My parents keep us grounded. My dad is a university lecturer and my mother a teacher in a rural area. They have instilled the values of being humble in life.

"My family has been the foundation of my success and provided me not only with opportunities in life but with values of life and hard work," Govender said.

At university, he founded the South African Medical Students Association to facilitate medical training and outreach programmes. He also designed a website providing online tuition to high school students, an idea being rolled out for medical students.

Govender prides himself on challenging his academic talents, and wants other students to know they can do that too.

"I believe the secret to success is smart work instead of hard work.

"It's important for scholars to classify and understand knowledge to the most profound level as reasonably possible. Thereafter memory will automatically set in.

"My advice to students in all fields of study is to strive for the best that you can be. Aim for the stars, and you may find yourself landing on the moon," he said.

The Master's degree he is pursuing is in the Health Sciences. On relaxation, and a clear shortage of time to do so: "Oh, I relax through music.

"I sing South Indian classical music and play the harmonium, violin and keyboard, and also played at a violin concert in Germany.

"That's it? Are those your only talents?"

Govender laughs, before adding sheepishly, "Well, I swim the 1.6km Midmar Mile race every year!"

"I sing South Indian classical music and play the harmonium, violin and keyboard, and also played at a violin concert in Germany.

"That's it? Are those your only talents?"

Govender laughs, before adding sheepishly, "Well, I swim the 1.6km Midmar Mile race every year!"

"I sing South Indian classical music and play the harmonium, violin and keyboard, and also played at a violin concert in Germany.

"That's it? Are those your only talents?"

Govender laughs, before adding sheepishly, "Well, I swim the 1.6km Midmar Mile race every year!"



Boy genius, Kumeren Govender, is not short of talents. He sings South Indian classical music and plays the harmonium, violin and keyboard, and has also played at a violin concert in Germany.

