

# LAKE NATRON CONSULTATIVE GROUP

Press Statement

Nairobi, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2008

## THE GROUP RESPONDS TO THE STATEMENT BY NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION REGARDING THE LAKE NATRON SODA ASH PROJECT

The Lake Natron Consultative Group (The Group) takes note of the statement by the National Development Corporation (NDC), the co-investor with Tata Chemicals Ltd (TLC), insisting that the Lake Natron Soda Ash Project will go ahead.

We also take note of the statement that The Group is responsible for the woes now facing the soda ash project, especially what NDC termed "negative publicity".

Further, the assertion that NDC is concerned about the environment and has responded by shifting the project site (32 kms away) and commissioned a new Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) and Integrated Management Planning process for the Ramsar site, are taken note of. NDC's statement also stated that the soda ash project will not harm the lesser flamingos, the local people and biodiversity in general.

## The Group's Response

The Lake Natron Consultative Group would like to state as follows:

- a. The statement by NDC goes counter to the recent announcement by Tata Chemicals Ltd that it has withdrawn the project as originally conceptualised. Quoted in *The Hindustan Times* of India, the TCL Managing Director Mr Homi Khusrokhhan said:

"The Company is not in a position to take a view with regard to resumption 'til it has a chance to examine the final approved Ramsar Management Plan currently under preparation for Lake Natron." *The Hindustan Times* story titled **Green Groups halt Tata Plant in Tanzania** also quoted Mr Khusrokhhan saying, "...the original Environment and Social Impact Assessment.....should be treated as withdrawn)

It would appear that the NDC issued the statement on its own behalf and not on behalf of TCL. So, is the NDC on its own?

- b. The NDC is not in a position to determine the fate of the proposed project since it is also a player in the process. According to Tanzanian laws, the Minister for Environment in the Vice President's Office has the final word. So far, Hon Dr Batilda Buriani has demonstrated fairness and objectivity with regard to this issue and we highly commend her for this.
- c. The woes now facing the proposed soda ash project are largely attributable to NDC. As a government agency working with Tata Chemicals Ltd, the NDC failed to advise the government on the need to follow the due process as prescribed by Tanzanian laws. AT the same time NDC failed to defend the soda ash project in all the stakeholder meetings held to discuss the issue.

NDC did not insist that all the necessary information and data (such as feasibility and cost-benefit analysis) be in place before coming out in public on the project. The result was the disaster that was the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) report, which was faulted by the Technical Advisory Committee of the National Environmental Management Council (NEMC) on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2007 and was overwhelmingly rejected during the public hearing on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2008. Stakeholders further rejected the project during the Ramsar Advisory Mission (RAM) in February and the World Bank meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2008 in Dar es Salaam.

- d. The NDC did not demand that an Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for the Ramsar site be developed before floating the soda ash proposal. This contravened the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance of which Tanzania is a signatory. Instead, the investor decided to put the cart before the horse.

To be credited, however, is the new Minister for Environment (Hon Dr Batilda Burhani) who issued an order on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008 that no further project processes touching on the soda ash project will be allowed until the Integrated Management Plan for Lake Natron is developed and approved. It is therefore belated for NDC to state that it would ensure that an IMP is done.

- e. The statement by NDC on the impacts of the proposed project are contrary a document developed by its own consultants. The ESIA Report explains in detail the negative social and ecological impacts of the project, which include impacts on flamingos, impacts on pastoral livelihoods, tourism and pressure on natural resources (including firewood and water). It also mentions positive impacts among them 150 permanent jobs and 2,000 casual ones and "millions of US dollars" to the Tanzanian economy. The new "perspectives" on these issues by NDC are therefore not tenable unless backed by new studies.
- f. Strong opposition to the soda ash project has come from Tanzanians of all walks of life, professionals and the donor community. In addition, local communities at

Pinyiny, Ngare Sero, Matali, Gelai, Kitumbeine and other villages around Lake Natron have said "No".

These local people are not environmentalists but poor people who are worried about the negative impacts of the project on their sources of livelihoods (e.g ecotourism, pastoralism). They are also worried about being displaced from their land and a trampling of their rights. The claim that so many million US \$ will be pumped to the national economy has little relevance to the local people.

- g. The Group has stated before that shifting the factory site 32 kms away does not necessarily mitigate the negative impacts of the proposed project. If anything, it is likely to spread the impacts over a wider area thus leaving a huge ecological footprint on the landscape. Critically important, the raw material will still be removed from Lake Natron using a complex grid of pipes and pumps. The negative impacts on the Lesser Flamingos and other forms of biodiversity that depend on the lake are therefore not likely to change.
- h. Finally, The Group would not like to see the Kenyan soda ash mining experience replayed in Tanzania. In spite of being in operation for over 100 years, soda ash mining at Lake Magadi in Kenya has not benefited the local community. Government reports (CBS 2003) show that Magadi Division is one of the poorest in Kajiado District and in the country, in spite of the massive investment by Magadi Soda Company (which has now been acquired by Tata Chemicals Ltd).

To the contrary, the Magadi Soda ash project has caused displacement of local communities from their land, environmental degradation, poor health and now an acute shortage of fresh water after the construction of the second plant. Until recently, the company paid 10 Kenyan cents for 1 tonne of the soda ash raw material (1 US \$ = 60 Ksh and 1 Ksh = 100 cents). This was reviewed to Ksh 26 per tonne in a new land lease that was opposed by the local community but extended by the government in controversial circumstances

- i. As The Group, we shall continue to engage in a debate founded on facts regarding this issue. We owe it to the local community, the global community and future generations to ensure that the resources at Lake Natron are not jeopardised by development that is not sustainable. Tata Chemicals Ltd seems to be in agreement with this. We now ask the National Development Corporation to do the same.

In conclusion, The Group would like to urge the Minister of natural Resources and Tourism and the Minister of Environment in Tanzania, to ensure that no further processes related to the proposed soda ash project are undertaken before the Integrated Management Plan for the Lake Natron Ramsar site is completed.

The plan should be preceded by detailed studies, including the ecology and breeding behaviour of the lesser flamingos and cost benefit analysis.

For more details contact:

Ken Mwathe

**Coordinator, Lake Natron Consultative Group**

BirdLife International,

Africa Partnership Secretariat,

ICIPE Campus, Kasarani Road,

P.O Box 3502 – 00100 Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254 20 8562246/8562490

Fax +254 20 8562259

Office cell +254 734 600905 or +254 722 200238

Personal Cell +254 733 926191

#### **LAKE NATRON CONSULTATIVE GROUP INSTITUTIONS**

1. East African Wildlife Society (EAWLS) [www.eawildlife.org](http://www.eawildlife.org)
2. Nature Kenya [www.naturekenya.org](http://www.naturekenya.org)
3. BirdLife Africa Partnership Secretariat [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)
4. African Conservation Centre (ACC) [www.conservationafrica.org](http://www.conservationafrica.org)
5. Youth For Conservation [www.youthforconservation.org](http://www.youthforconservation.org)
6. South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO)
7. Kenya Wetlands Forum (KWF) [www.eawildlife.org](http://www.eawildlife.org)
8. Centre for Minority Rights Development (CEMIRIDE) [www.cemiride.info](http://www.cemiride.info)
9. Kenya Community Based Tourism Network (KECOBAT)
10. Environmental Liaison Centre International (ELCI) [www.elci.org](http://www.elci.org)
11. Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Law (CREEL)
12. Wildlife Clubs of Kenya (WCK) [www.wildlifeclubskenya.wildlifedirect.org](http://www.wildlifeclubskenya.wildlifedirect.org)
13. Ethiopia Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS)
14. Born Free Foundation [www.bornfree.org](http://www.bornfree.org)
15. Uganda Wildlife Society
16. Nature Uganda [www.natureuganda.org](http://www.natureuganda.org)
17. Lawyers Environmental Action Team (LEAT), Tanzania [www.leat.or.tz](http://www.leat.or.tz)
18. Forum for Environment (Ethiopia) [www.ffe-ethiopia.org](http://www.ffe-ethiopia.org)
19. Horn of Africa - Regional Environment Centre/Network, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia [www.hoarec.org](http://www.hoarec.org)
20. Djibouti Nature [www.hobotraveler.com/na\\_djibouti-nature.php](http://www.hobotraveler.com/na_djibouti-nature.php)
21. The Heritage Society [www.heritagesociety.org](http://www.heritagesociety.org)
22. Game Rangers Association of Africa [www.gameranger.org](http://www.gameranger.org)
23. Maa Civil Society Forum
24. Lake Naivasha Riparian Association [www.lakenaivasha.org](http://www.lakenaivasha.org)
25. American Council For Wildlife Preservation

26. PIBI Biological Research Foundation
27. Kenya Alliance of Residents Association [www.kara.or.ke](http://www.kara.or.ke)
28. Kenya Water and Sanitation Network (KEWASNET)
29. Ecotourism Kenya [www.ecotourismkenya.org](http://www.ecotourismkenya.org)
30. Ilkisongo Pastoralist Initiatives (IPI), Monduli & Longido Tanzania
31. Journalists Environmental Association of Tanzania (JET)
32. Miliru-Bushi Organization Kenya (MIBOK)
33. Wildlife for Sustainable Development, Ethiopia