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Concern after suspension of NC scientists

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NEWS EDITOR

CONCERN has been expressed that the dire situation at Kamfers Dam could deteriorate following the suspension of three scientists from the Department of Economic Affairs, Tourism, Environment and Conservation.

Mark Anderson, Julius Koen and Eric Hermann from the department's scientific investigations section were suspended earlier this week, apparently as a result of complaints received about their attempts to secure the future of the globally threatened lesser flamingo at Kamfers Dam for posterity.

Wessa:NC said in a statement yesterday it was gravely concerned that while Anderson and Hermann were suspended, the situation at Kamfers Dam could deteriorate while they are not there to monitor changes, threats and the health of the flamingo chicks.

"We believe other national NGOs and the Save the Flamingo Association share our concerns."

The organisation asked whether someone else in the scientific investigation section was capable of doing the monitoring in their absence.

"Who will be carrying out this critical task which could prevent a possible catastrophe at Kamfers Dam?"

"The implications of their suspension have far-reaching consequences for conservation in our province, which will increase if their suspensions are lengthy.

"Who will be providing scientific support services in their absence, recommending management actions, ap-

proving permits and providing specialist advice to the public?"

It pointed out in a press statement that as dedicated and loyal scientists with conservation at heart, the three men put in a massive effort to protect the Kamfers Dam ecosystem since 1991, and established a successful breeding island for the flamingos through a productive partnership with Ekapa Mining.

"Over the years these three enthusiastic conservationists have voluntarily served on conservation committees and trusts and supported Wessa:NC and its projects in addition to their mandated task of investigating, monitoring and conserving our Province's wildlife.

"This was without any financial gain, and Wessa:NC has for many years supported their department in return.

"Any other conservation-orientated organisation would encourage their employees to be involved in committees and projects in their private capacity promoting the conservation of our natural heritage. Dedicated and experienced scientists are as scarce as flamingo teeth, especially in the Northern Cape."

It added that another great concern was that they were retained as scientists in the department to provide expert scientific comment on environmental impact assessments. "Who will fulfil this role in their absence and ensure that developments are environmentally sustainable and biodiversity is not lost? We are very concerned that the department's critical task of conserving our Province's wildlife and biodiversity is currently severely compromised."