



Kingdom of the Netherlands

UNESCO World Heritage Centre  
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Permanent Delegation of the  
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Contact  
Karin Kok  
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Reference  
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Date: 3 February 2022

Subject: notification of the intention of gas extraction Colonies of Benevolence

Dear Mr L. Eloundou Assomo,

In accordance with Article 172 of the Operational Guidelines, I hereby inform you about the proposed extraction of gas at the 'Colonies of Benevolence' World Heritage Site (1555).

The Government Gazette of 2 September 2021 gives notice of the submission for inspection of the Draft Memorandum on the Scope and Level of Detail regarding the proposal to extract gas in the municipalities of Westerveld and Weststellingwerf.

The gas fields in this area form part of a series of small gas fields, the existence of which has long been established, and are situated near to and partly underneath the Colonies of Benevolence World Heritage Site.

The possibility of gas extraction was known about at the time the application was submitted. Reference is made to this in Chapter 7, paragraph 7.5 of the management plan: 'Dealing with trends and developments in Component part A, Frederiksoord-Wilhelminaoord'.

With regard to the phases of the decision-making process and underlying investigations, please note the following.

Studies are currently underway to determine the optimum location for a potential gas extraction well. Nine possible locations are being considered. Each of these locations is situated outside the World Heritage Site, but a number do lie within the - possible future - buffer zone.

Currently the first phase of the EIA is being prepared, of which a first phase of an HIA is an integral part. In this HIA the possible effects of each of the nine locations are being examined. In selecting the optimum extraction site, the importance of the World Heritage Site will be taken into account, both directly (via the HIA) and indirectly (EIA report). As such, the importance of the World Heritage Site will be a factor in the decision-making process.

After concluding the first phase of the EIA an integral effect analysis will be made, including technical aspects, finances, environment and long term perspectives, to select a preferred location. The decision on the preferred location is planned for autumn 2022.

A further research – the second phase of the EIA - will look into the broader seismological effects on the subsurface of the gas extraction; this is a separate matter from the location of the extraction well. Here, too, the presence of the World Heritage Site will be a factor in the study, through a second phase of the HIA. Any possible seismological effects – direct or indirect – on the World Heritage Site will be examined.

It is envisaged that a second opinion on this aspect will be requested, to be carried out by TNO research institute - an independent institute - in collaboration with the State Supervision of Mines

(SodM). Both the investigation and the second opinion will be available with the second phase HIA.

In the second phase of the EIA, including the HIA, solutions with non or the least possible effects are sought.

Once all the studies have been completed, the location of the extraction well will be definitively laid down in a governmental implementation plan/project decision on the basis of the Spatial Planning Act (or its successor: the Environment Act). The World Heritage importance will also be taken into account.

The decision whether or not to allow gas production will be taken on the basis of the Mining Act and is expected in the autumn of 2023.

We anticipate two more moments at which the Netherlands will contact the World Heritage Centre with more information.

- a- Regarding the decision-making on the preferred location; anticipated autumn 2022
- b- Following the final decision about the request to extract gas anticipated autumn 2023

Trusting that we have provided you with sufficient information,

Yours sincerely,

Hans Wesseling  
Ambassador  
Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to UNESCO