

Statement on Potential Namibian Biomass Export to Hamburg

13 October 2020. The ongoing dialogue on exploring opportunities to utilise Namibian bush biomass in the German city of Hamburg started in September 2019 when a delegation from Namibia visited the northern German port. The delegation was led by Mr Ned Sibeya of the Namibian National Planning Commission and Mr Joseph Hailwa of the Directorate of Forestry, and included further representatives from Government, as well as both industry and farmer representatives, industry associations, environmental NGOs, and academia.

During these initial discussions, it was suggested that energy from Namibian biomass could become part of the Hamburg coal exit strategy. However, the prerequisite for this is that both socio-economic and ecological benefits are ensured across the entire supply chain. As a result of the initial delegation visit, a feasibility process was started, aiming to explore a mutually beneficial relationship, ensuring that as much value as possible should remain in Namibia and as many people as possible should benefit from the partnership.

The Namibia Biomass Industry Group (N-BiG) is a Section 21 non-profit industry association, representing a wide range of private sector and academic members active within the Namibian bush-biomass sector. Part of the association's mandate is to explore market opportunities and promote industry diversification. In this context, N-BiG supports the feasibility process on assessment of exports opportunities of biomass products. At the same time, N-BiG also closely supports local biomass feasibility projects, such as the ongoing NamPower 40 MW Otjikoto Biomass Powerplant near Tsumeb in Namibia. We feel that both local utilisation and international export opportunities need to be pursued in synergy in order to achieve sufficient economies of scale, and therein, maximise local benefits of our vast biomass resource. Due to the extent of bush encroachment in Namibia, there is no foreseeable competition of resource between these two approaches.

The Namibian and German partners have agreed on a feasibility process that consists of targeted working groups and public consultation workshops, where the final results are expected in mid-2021. N-BiG represents the Namibian private sector in this process and is committed to making all outcomes available to relevant stakeholders and the Namibian public at large. The association is confident that the process will lead to valuable insights into the viability of biomass exports, whereby all aspects of potential biomass exports will be carefully examined, including environmental sustainability, compliance with climate policy, social impact and economic viability.

Besides N-BiG, Namibia is well represented within the aforementioned process by, amongst others, representatives of the Namibian Embassy to Germany, Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) represented by Directorate of Forestry, the Namibia Nature Foundation, the Walvis Bay Corridor Group, and the Forest Stewardship Council Southern Africa.

There is currently no commitment to biomass exports by any of the involved parties, as it is dependent on the outcome of the thorough and objective feasibility process.

N-BiG and its members have not been contacted by Earthlife Namibia or any of the other signatories of the recently circulated press release. As such, it is unclear if and to what extent Namibian stakeholders have been consulted prior to the press release, in order to substantiate the strong claims that were made.

The Namibian biomass sector has almost doubled its employment from 6.000 to 11.000 within the past five years and put in place important measures ensuring environmental and social sustainability, such as internationally recognised sustainability certification standards. Charcoal production has become a major contributor to agricultural exports, with goals to further grow and modernise the sector.



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N-BiG further promotes other innovative biomass value chains, such as bush-based animal fodder, biochar, wood pelleting, bioenergy, and others.

N-BiG supports a diversified, inclusive and nationally beneficial bush biomass sector. A vibrant bush-biomass sector will provide room for unskilled labour as well as for formal qualifications in support of (semi-) mechanised harvesting processes, this is in line with strategic development goals and Namibia's development agenda. Thus, unsubstantiated calls for the sector not to explore the modernisation of harvesting methods and to disregard potentials to explore industrialised value chains, do not seem to be based on the interest to develop Namibia's economy and provide livelihoods for its people.

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