



## Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation

For Immediate Release [27 July 2009]

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### West Coast's environment damaged by mining

Diamond mining on South Africa's West Coast has permanently altered the communities' landscape, water supplies, marine and plant life, and the landscape has been severely damaged. This is contained in a research study released in Johannesburg today by Bench Marks Foundation.

Bench Marks is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on sustainability, development and economic empowerment.

"Community members across the board are very upset about how much environmental degradation in the area, caused by the mines, has occurred. The study points out that the poor monitoring capacity of the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) and the huge gap between policies and practice of the mining companies are to blame for this ruin," said John Capel, chief executive of Bench Marks Foundation.

A water sample taken from the Swartlinterjies River just below a major De Beers tailings dam close to Koingnaas by Bench Marks Foundation's researchers shows a dramatic negative impact on the particular river by its tailings facility. Diamonds tailings are the piles of gravel that have been 'washed' with sea water (due to the acute water scarcity in the area) and then dumped on the tailings facility.

The water sample contained, amongst others, magnesium. This causes diarrhoea in all new users. It also contains sodium which makes the water extremely salty and bitter and is undesirable for infants or persons on sodium restricted diets. In addition, samples showed evidence of sulphates which causes diarrhoea in all individuals; user adaptation does not occur and it has a strong salty and bitter taste.

These findings contradict the reports published by the mining companies involved in the area. De Beers claim to recognise natural resources as a national asset aligned in importance to diamonds. Measures include conservation projects, research on bio-diversity, energy and climate care programmes and water management technologies.

Another company in the area, Trans Hex, states that environmental management at all its operations is largely governed by its environmental policy, which sets the company's broad

commitment to sound environmental management, as well as its safety, health, and environment group.

According to the study, Trans Hex would do much better rehabilitating former natural conditions in all these areas where it has mined.

“The areas mined by Trans Hex around Hondeklip Bay, and De Beers around Koingnaas and Kleinzee, look like moonscapes and will probably take hundreds of years to recover,” the study noted.

Currently, responsible mining is not happening on the West Coast, the study concludes.

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### **Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation**

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks’ agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies’ operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

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