

# ADVOCACY

## Startling St Lucia revelations

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### THE DUNE MINING DEBATE

Little people win St Lucia Round 1

### THE ST LUCIA DUNE-MINING CONTROVERSY

Criticism stems from mass hyst

### Lake must be saved

Lake St Lucia under threat by dune mining

### Sign up and save the dunes

negative

### the Star

hat's St Lucia worth?

more South Africa

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JAMES CLARKE

### THE FORUM

St Lucia: more objections to mining scheme

Some of the most important environmental issues had not even been addressed by RBM and had certainly

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Dr Ted Avis, a botanist involved since 1989 in trying to assess the impact mining would have at St Lucia, comes out fighting in this article, arguing that an emotive Press sensationalised the issue and undermined public confidence in scientific (and democratic) Integrated Environmental Management. The Press, he says, did the public no favours.

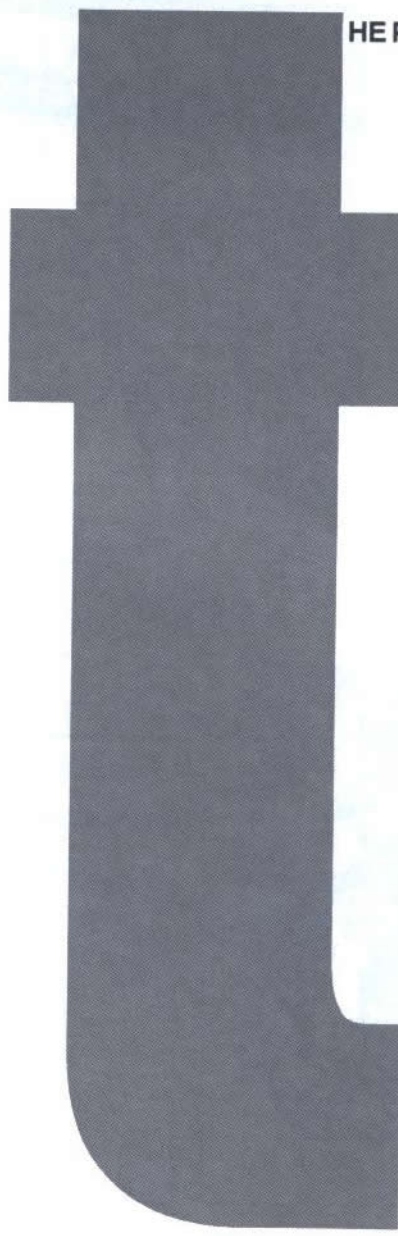
### THE PROPOSAL

by Richards Bay Minerals to mine heavy minerals from the sand dunes of the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia resulted in an unprecedented outcry. The media and particularly the press, played a major role in this debate by adding ample fuel to the fire.

What I intend to do here is to trace the media involvement in the St Lucia issue since it first became public in September 1989, and to show how the media have influenced the entire debate.

The St Lucia controversy presents a fine example of advocacy journalism, with biased and inaccurate reporting frustrating scientists to such an extent that requests for objective reporting in newspapers were made to a number of journals (See for example, *African Wildlife* 1991). This is probably because it is the primary objective of reporters to sell their product by means of a "good", and preferably sensational, controversial story. This is fighting talk, and I intend to substantiate it by tracing the involvement of the press in the St Lucia controversy since its genesis in September 1989.

Media influences on the St Lucia controversy were investigated by logging newspaper articles written on St Lucia since June 1989. These were obtained from various sources including the SA Press Cutting Agency in Natal. All these articles were perused by the author and two Rhodes University journalism students, and categorised as either pro-mining, anti-mining or neutral (objective). No criteria were needed for anti-mining articles since headings such as "Outrage over threatened rape of Natal"



# in environmental reporting

(Saturday Star, 9/11/89) were fairly self-explanatory. Articles which provided a balanced, informed viewpoint and had been well researched were classified as neutral or objective, but pro-mining articles were more difficult to identify. They tended to present arguments in favour of mining, and were more frequent in magazines.

A total of 1351 articles were checked over the 52-month period from June 1989 until August 1993. This represents a significant proportion, but not all, of the articles written about the St Lucia issue. In addition to all these articles, a massive petition under the heading "Save St Lucia" was initiated by *The Star* and supported by the *Natal Witness* and *Mercury*. This petition generated almost 300 000 signatures against the mining, and was a direct product of the coverage of the issue provided by both television and newspapers. It is interesting to note that the issue of coal mining in the Kruger National Park, which attracted national and international condemnation, elicited only about one third of that number of signatures in a petition campaign.

The results of the St Lucia media survey are presented in the graph, which traces the number of articles per month in the three categories from June 1989 to July 1993. The two critical aspects one needs to consider are the intensity of media activity in terms of the number of printed articles published during the past 52 months, and their content. A similar analysis was undertaken as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, since it provides a basis for the prediction of the probable impacts on public perceptions of the mining issue and hence on the image of St Lucia. In their article, St Lucia: the Sense(s) of the Place (one of the specialist reports in the St Lucia EIA), John Butler-Adam and Michael Haynes speculated that the intense publicity about St Lucia has created or fostered the image of St Lucia as a place of symbolic value in the collective

hearts of South Africans. Furthermore, the press gave the false impression that the mining would take place in a nature reserve, and that most of the Eastern Shores of St Lucia would be affected by mining. In fact, only 1436 hectares of the total 12 837 hectares of the Eastern Shores State Forest would be affected by mining, and this represents about one per cent of the so-called "Greater St Lucia Wetland Park". This highlights the very important and responsible role that the media have when reporting on environmental issues. Like the decision makers, developers and environmental consultants, the media should also be held accountable for their actions.

The peaks in the number of articles published correspond to various stages in the IEM procedure. Notice that only one or two articles were published in June, July and August 1989. It was during this period, when the initial study was undertaken by myself, Roy Lubke and Peter Jackson, that we attempted to invite comment from the public through the press. We sent out a number of press releases to SAPA and the Natal newspapers, but it was only *The Argus* that carried an article on St Lucia in June. At this time the forcing out of PW Botha was more newsworthy. The large peak in October and November 1989 follows the release of the original environmental study. These articles were very speculative, and presented an absolutely "worse case" scenario of the possible environmental impacts of mining. Headlines such as "St Lucia mine will have catastrophic results!" (*Business Day* 19/9/89) and "Stop the ravages of unspoiled areas!" (*Sunday Tribune* 17/9/89) were the order of the day. There was also concern raised over the inadequacy of the original report. This period also saw the launching of the "Save St Lucia" campaign in *The Star* (13/9/89).

Interest in the issue continued until April the following year, but it began to dwindle

## Public opinion could halt dune mining

50 000 support St Lucia campaign

By James Clarke

RBM'S MANAGING DIRECTOR, Mr Roy person, has given his assurances that his company will not mine the dunes north of St Lucia. The environmental consultants predict disastrous consequences to the environment.

Schoolchildren, conservationists, residents of St Lucia, businessmen and

The Star's Save St Lucia petition has topped the 50 000 mark — and signatures continue to pour in. Up to last night 51 111 signatures had been received from shops and offices, from schools, technical and universities, as well as from some of the

## Outrage threatened rape of Natal

REHABILITATING is a fair process that will of plants has stated proposed a percent in der pine p some R25 k mining off a life-time r recreate a v "The in biously sell plantations ed, but clea ensary that re mining, w

## This land is our land

The case against the mining of St Lucia is controversial

## Environment becomes a big issue

THE case against the planned mining of the eastern shores of St Lucia and for its alternative use needs to be clearly stated. Environmentalists can be grateful to Richards Bay Minerals (RBM) to this extent — the threat to the dunes and pristine habitats has galvanised environmentally patriotic South Africans into action.

## Mining battle h

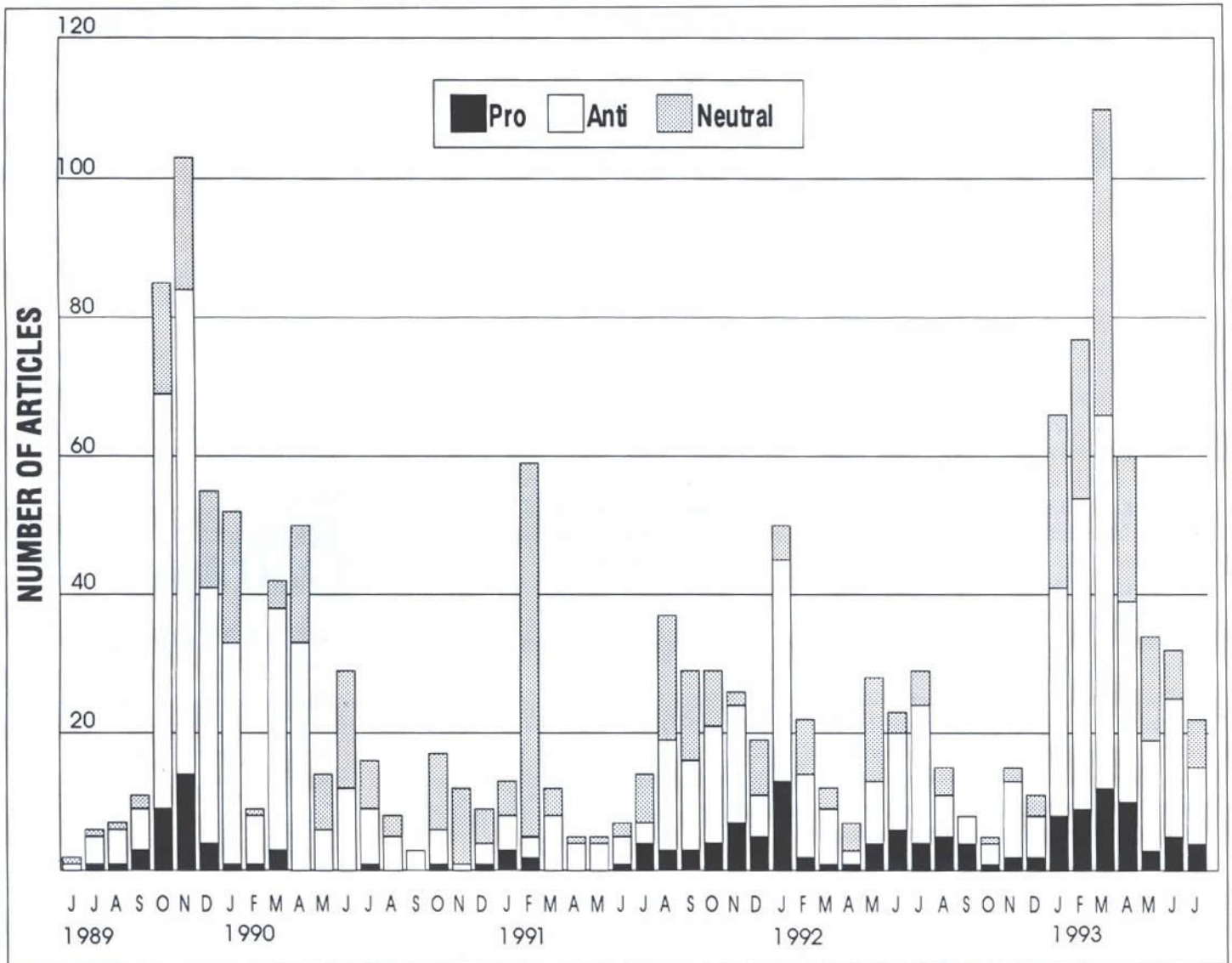
Fishermen have yet to speak

## Anglers, divers unite in fight to stop mining

ONCE we were a tiny group. We were very lonely. I speak of the professional conservationist in the 1950s and 1960s. We were at the end of an era and the beginning of another. Vaughan Kirby, the first chief conservator of Zululand, went through hell between 1918 and 1929. Can you imagine how he felt when the Natal Provincial Administration gave in to the political pressures of the day and opened up Umfolozi Game Reserve hunting with the disgusting excuse "it would reduce the tsetse fly". Only George Campbell went to the P-wear.

VOICE FROM WILDERNES Ian Player

## ST LUCIA PRESS COVERAGE



steadily throughout 1990. It was during this period that the detailed Environmental Impact Assessment following IEM procedure was put into practice. Scientific and social studies, as well as liaison with "interested and affected parties" through a system of regular circulars was ongoing during 1990 and most of 1991. Such banal and factual information was clearly not very newsworthy, and we experienced great difficulty in implementing the public consultation programme, since most press releases were not published. However, there was a slight shift, from June 1990 to July 1991, towards more objective reporting, and articles were a little more factual and accurate.

The peak in interest in late 1991 and early 1992 corresponds to the release of the 23 specialist reports for public review. The anti-mining articles focused on the inadequate

**"The intense publicity about St Lucia has created or fostered the image of St Lucia as a place of symbolic value in the collective hearts of South Africans."**

quacy of the two-year study contained in the 1000-page volume, but there was in fairness a larger proportion of objective reports compared to earlier coverage (See graph).

Renewed interest in May, June and July 1992 was in response to the expected release of the Environmental Impact Assessment, and comments made about the issue by Minister George Bartlett and discussions in Parliament concerning a private members Wetland Conservation Bill. Another inter-

esting news item was the statement that two of the doyens of conservation, Ian Player and Nolly Zaloumis were told to "take a hike" from the board of the Natal Parks Board, supposedly because of their strong opposition to mining (*Sunday Times*, 12/6/92). This was followed by reports on the formation of a coalition of conservationists who vowed to fight for the Eastern Shores of St Lucia. This helped strengthen the year-old Campaign for St Lucia, which continued to receive a significant amount of press coverage, as reflected in the overall anti-mining stance of the press.

1993 saw another flourish in the number of articles, but there was a greater amount of objectivity than in previous years. This may have been because the previous anti-mining attitude led to calls for objectivity, such as Minister Bartlett's letter printed under the

	PROMINING	ANTI MINING	NEUTRAL	TOTAL
Natal Mercury	17	38	27	82
Natal Witness	18	44	18	80
Natal Daily News	18	102	46	166
Zululand Observer	8	1	16	25
Sunday Tribune	5	12	3	20
The Star	10	52	14	76
Other & magazines	54	164	111	329
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>235</b>	<b>778</b>

heading "St Lucia: plea for objectivity" (*Saturday Star* 14/1/93). It appears that in general the articles in January and February 1993 supported the IEM procedure being followed. However, after the release of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) the focus shifted to its shortcomings, and to cases where environmentalists sought to discredit its findings because of the reports perceived favouring the mining option. Due to this perception, certain leading interested parties who supported the IEM procedure (eg. The Wildlife Society) registered rejection of the EIR and the IEM procedure.

The large number of articles in March and April 1993 correspond to the release of the long-awaited EIR on 18 March 1993. The greatest proportion of objective reports appeared at this time, mainly because they simply reported on the findings of the EIR. It is also possible that the journalists covering the issue did not feel sufficiently qualified to interpret and pronounce judgement on a report of such scientific complexity, although such humility had never been commonplace in the covering of this issue. It was only later on that articles began focussing on the report's shortcomings, fuelled by the anti-mining lobbyists' comments. Headlines such as "St Lucia report dismissed by anti-mine campaigners" (*The Citizen* 20/3/93) and "Dune-mining EIA called a whitewash" (*Sunday Tribune* 21/3/93) received prominence. Interest in the issue began losing momentum by mid 1993, but it is likely that November will see renewed interest when the Review Panel Hearings are held. This represents the final stage in the process, and is the last opportunity the public will have to voice further objections.

From the table we see that 53 per cent of all articles written in the past two years have taken an anti-mining stance and only 16.7

per cent were sympathetic towards mining. The balance (30.3 per cent) are impartial or objective, but unfortunately this impartiality does not make up the majority of articles. Ideally this should be the case, so that readers can make up their own minds concerning important issues. One could argue that the articles actually reflect public opinion, but this is a weak argument since an even larger proportion of articles from June 1989 to April 1990 (70 per cent) viewed the mining option in a negative light. This emotive, conservation orientated stand by the press has strongly influenced public opinion and resulted in an anti-mining mindset. This was aided by other media coverage, particularly national television. Callie Long's report for *TVI News* painted a very bleak picture of the future of St Lucia, as did both *Carte Blanche* and *50/50* in October 1989. Even the very extensive public consultation programme, with its objective and factual information being readily supplied as part of the IEM procedure, was not able to dilute this anti-mining attitude. This is mainly because most people are disinclined to read the rather lengthy and somewhat boring reports, and are therefore willing to accept summaries or other assessments from the press.

As expected, the largest number of articles emanate from the Natal newspapers, but *The Argus*, the *Sunday Times* and the *Beeld* also published a significant number. In the final Environmental Impact Report the CSIR surveyed a total of 1155 press reports that appeared in 148 publications, from September 1991 to July 1993. It judged 58.4 per cent to oppose mining, and only 9.5 per cent to favour mining. It also found that 560 articles (47.5 per cent) appeared in the Natal press, with 438 of these appearing in the *Daily News*, *Natal Mercury*, *Natal Witness* and *Zululand Observer*. Similar results are

presented in the table, but it is worth noting that the first two newspapers, together with *The Star*, *The Argus* and the *Sunday Tribune* published 379 or 49 per cent of all articles. All these newspapers belong to Argus Newspapers Ltd, a company solely owned by the Anglo American Group.

One can quite confidently conclude from this analysis, as did the CSIR in their final report, that reporting of the St Lucia issue has tended to dramatise it and express opposition to the mining option. These articles reflect the emotional nature of the issue, with scientific facts and tangible evidence being ignored. In their eloquent specialist report, *St Lucia: the Sense(s) of the Place*, Butler-Adam and Haynes conclude that "...it would not be inaccurate to suggest that on the basis of public interest, St Lucia represents the catalyst in an environmental renaissance which has recently swept South Africa", and furthermore that "... reality as it is understood and perceived by the public is one that is largely created and shaped by mass vendors of information such as television and press. Consequently, it might be ventured that the media had the most formative influence on the image of St Lucia as a wilderness area of inestimable value". The media therefore have a very responsible role to play in the formation of public opinion on crucial issues such as the environment.

Unfortunately, press coverage of the St Lucia issue has been largely counter-productive to the aims and objectives of Integrated Environmental Management. It has undermined public confidence in a process that has worthwhile principles such as informed decision-making, accountability for decisions taken, democratic regard for individual rights and obligations and the opportunity for public and specialist input in the decision-making process. One of the challenges environmental science therefore faces in South Africa is to educate reporters about the objectives and principles of environmental management, as unfortunately it appears that the blind are (mis)leading the blind. ●

◆ Dr Ted Avis is a lecturer in the Department of Botany at Rhodes University.

See next page for a response from James Clarke, an assistant editor on *The Star*.

## "Press exposed underhanded St Lucia deal"

James Clarke takes up the cudgel in defence of advocacy in the St Lucia issue, arguing that emotive journalism is much more effective than unemotional science.

**B**IASED and inaccurate reporting? Dr Avis could have been describing the very "scientific" report — that so-called EIA on mining at St Lucia put together at Rhodes — which put the Press on to the St Lucia deal in 1989. RBM was trying to rush the mining permit through before the public could stop it. The "scientific" report was a rush job which, I know, greatly embarrassed its authors. Yet it was used by RBM, to wave in front of dumb decision-makers — and they very nearly got away with it.

I believe in advocacy journalism. It got rid of apartheid. It got rid of Vorster and the Info scandal gang. It accelerated the acceptance of EIAs. It saved Kruger Park from being mined in 1981 for coal after being illegally prospected by Iscor with Government connivance.

This word "sensationalise" is used by some scientists without really understanding it. To print a full page article telling the public that there is a sneaky effort underway to mine St Lucia's Eastern Shores is not sensationalising the subject. It simply gives people an idea of its importance. To toss out the scientific jargon is not sensationalising — it is a newspaperman's duty to the public.

Science, up to this year, should have hanged its head in shame over the St Lucia affair. Of course the public has little faith in science. Science needs to **earn** respect not expect the Press to bestow it.

Dr Avis talks exactly as Minister Kotze talked: he says the Press "gave the false impression" that the nature reserve was being mined. Whatever some newspapers might have done at the beginning, they certainly have clarified, in the public mind, a very accurate picture now. Remember, for months RBM refused to talk to the SA Press. Only when ordered to do so (by RTZ in Britain) did they talk to the British Press. They did not give a damn about South Africa. *The Star* yelled blue murder about this — only then did RBM talk to us. They had the grace to apologise.

It is true mining is outside the existing reserve — just. But when mining takes place on the hills above a nature reserve it tends to spoil the atmosphere — at least for the discerning. This business about mining "affecting only one per cent of the St Lucia Wetland Park" is also Minister Kotze talking. What park? It does not exist.

I was the first newspaperman to see a sketch, done with colour pens, of the proposed park. The day I saw the thing, still wet, I was asked if I could be at the launch of the greater St Lucia Wetland Park, at St Lucia itself, next day! I couldn't. SABCTV was asked, and dutifully went. Nobody was more startled by the Minister's an-

nouncement that night on TV than his own staff. I lie. There **was** a group which was more startled — those who owned the land. Nobody had told them either.

Make no mistake, mining will ruin the St Lucia scene for all our kids and grandchildren. It might recover mid 21st century.

The reason for the valleys and peaks of interest in Press coverage which Dr Avis mentions are so obvious I would be offending readers' intelligence by explaining them.

The public have the Press to thank — not science or scientists — for exposing the underhanded St Lucia deal, the underhanded Kruger Park coal deal, the underhanded toxic waste scandal, for persuading Eskom (and other industries) to adopt a more aesthetic and scientific (natural science) attitude.

Emotive journalism — something which offends Dr Avis — is a great deal more effective than unemotional science. St Lucia is something which one **MUST** be emotional about. It is a uniquely beautiful and exciting place — one of the very few large unspoiled wildlife areas left in South Africa. It has international status as a wetland area and is a mustering area for birds on international flyways. (Why on earth do you think RBM was so scared of public debate?) Why must the public allow RBM to mine it simply because it will be cheaper for RBM to mine that soft sand than the more recalcitrant areas they own?

Dr Avis seems to think we were wrong making St Lucia a national issue. Where else have we got that is still almost unspoiled, wild and beautiful? Kruger, the Drakensberg, the Kalahari — and then?

I recall the pro-mining lobby sneering when Margaux Hemingway, in South Africa, appealed for St Lucia to be saved. "She's never been there!" they cried.

They were right. But when I spoke to RBM's two major scientific advisers (at Richards Bay) and asked if they thought the rehabilitative methods used at Richards Bay were good for St Lucia, one of them, Cambridge ecologist Dr Malcolm Coe, said he'd never been to St Lucia! I then asked Professor Rudi van Aarde. He hadn't been there either! Both told a Press conference they just hadn't had time — and neither has found time since. Yet St Lucia is a few minutes by chopper and 40 minutes by road.

Now I find that sensational.

As I say, scientists, as a group, have not emerged from the St Lucia debate with much glory. ●

◆ James Clarke is an assistant editor on *The Star*.