

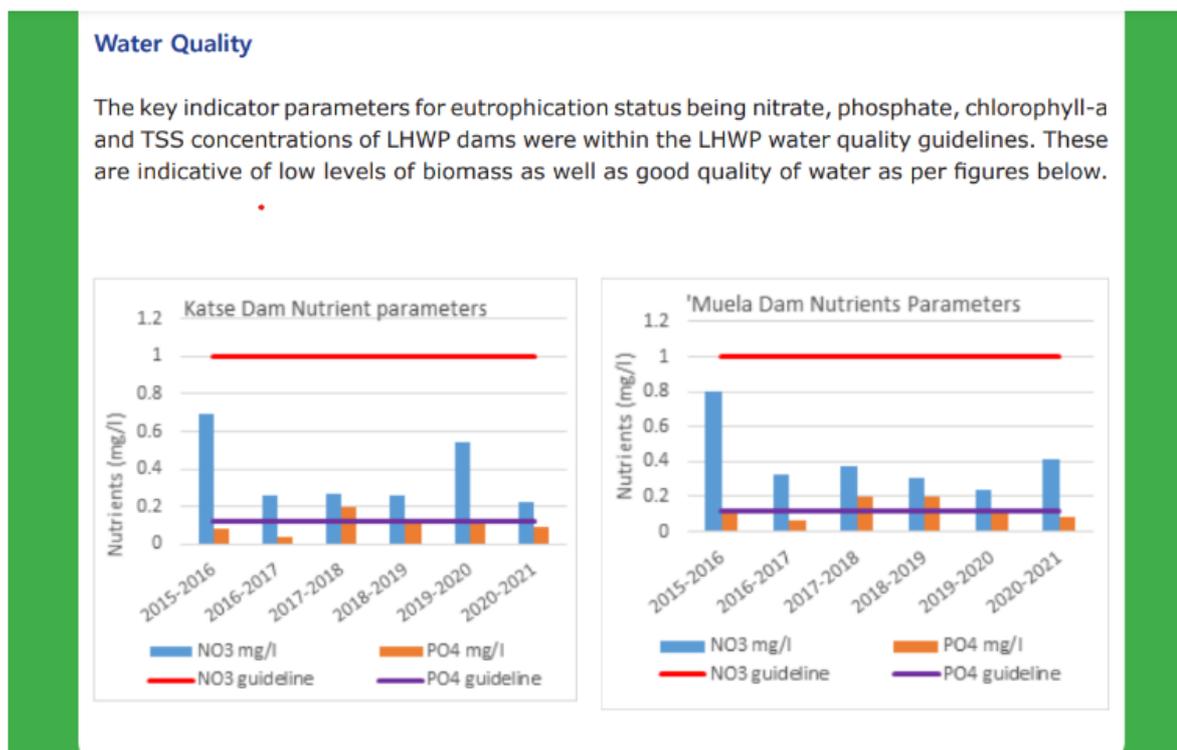


LETŠENG DIAMONDS

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Response to the article, “Report raises alarm over mines’ pollution of rivers critical to Lesotho Highlands Water Project.”

Letšeng Diamonds is disappointed by a news article titled “Report raises alarm over mines’ pollution of rivers critical to Lesotho Highlands Water Project” recently published in the Daily Maverick Newspaper. The article is littered with factual inaccuracies and is alarmist in its tone when the true facts demonstrate that there is no factual basis to the actual and implied assertions that Letšeng Diamonds is responsible for polluting waters that are destined for export to South Africa, thereby imperilling this important industry in Lesotho. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority’s 2020/2021 Annual Report, the LDHA confirms the water quality in the Katse and Muela Dams as “Good”. The below graphs (page 25 of the 2020/2021 Annual Report) are also included in the LDHA Annual report, reporting Nitrate levels (NO₃) of below 0.8mg/l since 2015, with no evidence of further assimilation of Nitrates over the 2015-2021 period. (https://www.lhda.org.ls/lhdaweb/Uploads/documents/Annual_Reports/Annual_Report_2020_21.pdf).



Letšeng Diamonds has not been shown the report relied upon by Ms Kabi in her article, in which she states: “...shows that laboratory-tested samples taken from the Khubelu River (downstream from the Letšeng Diamonds Mine) contain nitrate levels over 120 milligrams per litre (mg/l).”

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Letšeng Diamonds monitors the water quality in the Patising and Maloraneng streams and in the Khubelu River on a monthly basis. Water samples are taken from a number of points in these watercourses, at varying distances downstream from the Letšeng Diamond Mine. The samples collected are subjected to independent laboratory testing. No such levels of nitrates, as alluded to by Ms Kabi, have ever been detected. Our data indicate an average nitrate concentration of only c.11mg/l in the Khubelu River, which is in line with the natural level found within the region. These facts would have been shared with Ms Kabi had she asked for a comment from Letšeng Diamonds on this LHDA report. Unfortunately, she did not.

Moreover, Ms Kabi has commissioned an independent report (which she has shared with Letšeng Diamonds) which shows that at the very boundary of the mine on the Patising stream, before it even enters the Khubelu River, the highest nitrate reading recorded was 15mg/litre - which is in line with the natural levels of nitrates found within the region and, in respect of which, her own report states: "As nitrates are produced by the decay of plant, animal and human wastes, pollution of water with nitrate is typically found wherever intensive land use activities take place and nitrate-nitrogen concentrations exceeding 20mg/l are a common occurrence in groundwater."

Indeed, these nitrate levels are typical of naturally occurring levels recorded in the Letšeng mine area before the mining operations commenced. It is thus clear that there is no factual basis for Ms Kabi's assertions - even as evidenced by her own report (which she conveniently fails to mention in her article). Put simply, there is no basis whatsoever to suggest: "... operations at the Letšeng Diamond Mine ... continue to pollute water sources critical in the project catchment areas in Mokhotlong and Botha-Bothe."

The true facts are as follows:

Letšeng Diamonds' detailed Water Management Policy, which is publicly available on both the Letšeng Diamonds and Gem Diamonds websites, clearly sets out our adherence to the best practice standards and operational trends in water use and impact. We encourage all interested parties to engage with us, and also urge the accurate reporting of our activities, in which we will assist wherever possible. For example, Ms Kabi compared the water quality from surface water streams, not treated by a water treatment plant, to potable water standards (this is an inaccurate and misleading comparison to make). It is widely accepted that animal fouling in surface water streams and springs causes both nitrate and E.coli levels to increase (as confirmed in Ms Kabi's own report), and this is a common occurrence in subsistence-farming communities that are found in the Mokhotlong region.

Letšeng Diamonds continues to research and invest in new water treatment technologies, such as our bioremediation nitrate treatment solution, which was subjected to an intensive research and review process involving various experts, both regionally and internationally. Following the success of a test plant at Letšeng, a full-scale bioremediation plant has been designed with construction to commence shortly.

Bioremediation is a strategy that uses naturally occurring micro-organisms to break down chemical compounds, such as nitrate, into nitrogen gas (N₂). The passive bioremediation method of remediation is especially appealing as it does not produce any toxic or hazardous waste products. Not only does bioremediation create significantly less waste than alternative treatment methods, such as reverse osmosis, but it is also more cost-efficient and not as labour-intensive.

Water is one of the most valuable natural resources and safeguarding water sources through reduced consumption and quality stewardship is a priority globally as well as within the Mokhotlong region where our Letseng operation is based. Since Gem Diamonds started operating the Letseng mine in 2006, the operation has prioritised the stewardship of water through this comprehensive water management plan. The operational approach to water management has matured over time to align with appropriate best practice standards and operational trends in water use and impact. A detailed water monitoring protocol has been implemented at Letseng, looking at both water quality on-site and downstream, as well as consumption volumes through mining and treatment activities.

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