

## **Impact of the Closing of St Lucia Estuary on Small Scale Farmers**

### Brief Overview of Effected Small Farmers:

1. There are about 550 severely affected small farmers from Sokhulu community and about 350 from Dukuduku community. Each farmer supports an average of about 4-5 dependents.
2. Farming is a cornerstone economic activity for these two respective communities. It a daily bread actually. The absence of farming means that reliance on government grants is growing and crime is inevitable. Farming has been happening for over a century in the region, and has graduated from subsistence to recognizable industry.
3. In perspective, uMkhanyakude is one of the country's poor districts. Farming is keeping the flag flying. This industry employs more people than does tourism which is still strangled by effects of COVID19. These farmers are self-employed, employing workers for wages. It is so disturbing seeing such a disruption to livelihoods.

### Economic Impact of Constant Flooding:

4. Farmers were self-sufficient; able to send their own to school and afford basic needs. The constant flooding has pushed all these people out of work, taken away about a thousand job opportunities each year. Fresh farm produce was sold in Mtubatuba, Richards Bay, Empangeni and other towns across Zululand creating further small jobs which are much needed. Wholesaling to vans and trucks is now history.
5. Farmers have lost over 4 years' worth of production. This has had a devastating effect in household economy. Poverty is knocking on many doors. We all had to postpone our dreams and attend the current reality caused by closing of St Lucia Estuary. Hope has slowly been fading away with all the tactics that have been played at the expense of these poor farmers. The economic sabotage stings so painfully, in the name of conservation. What is being achieved by destroying one thing for another? All farmers (small & commercial) plead for the bread they've been robbed of.

### Sideline impact of the Closed St Lucia Estuary

6. Mosquitos: with this constant flooding, our villages have been terrorized by these stinging creatures. Life this side is no longer enjoyable. Their strong presence is threatening the resurgence of the deadlier Malaria disease. Please fix this problem as soon as possible. Even livestock suffers. Before these floods this problem was not here. Mosquitos now have wide breeding ground in what used to be our farms.

**Small Scale Farmers briefing to the Portfolio Committee on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries  
08 February 2022 via ZOOM Meeting, presented by Mr Sbusiso Mthembu**

7. Dangers of wildlife attacks on human: constant floods have widened crocodiles' territory further towards our villages. Dogs, in particular have been killed by crocodiles, which signals that soon there could be a human attack. Hippos are now roaming around at night - it's not safe anymore

Stance on Conservation

8. Farmers are no enemies of conservation. We are passionate about the environment too. This is our heritage after all. We are not saying that the health of St Lucia Estuary shall be sacrificed for wellbeing of farmlands, NO. Farming and conservation has been coexisting in this area for over a century – it's nothing new. What is new is this 'let nature take its course' policy being introduced by iSimangaliso Wetland Park.
9. Tell us, laymen, we are not scientists; how is the mere Mfolozi river expected to climb that high berm there at St Lucia Estuary area? What else did the GEF Project achieve apart from connecting Mfolozi River to the St Lucia Estuary? The decision which led into excessive silt clogging banks of the lake – introducing reeds which are today threatening to cover the whole lake? Pumping mud that has destroyed kilometers of mangroves? And disturbed habitats of St Lucia Estuary.
10. Why was the GEF project implemented selectively? It might have meant well at first but truth is that the ecological catastrophe that we are seeing in the St Lucia Estuary is also facilitated by this GEF project. One need not be a scientist to see that the St Lucia Estuary is in an ICU state. In fact it is just a muddy swamp. It falls out of the definition of an 'estuary.' A complete opposite of an ideal estuary. A lake, perhaps.

January 2021 Assisted Breaching

11. The January 2021 assisted breaching had very little to no impact into farmlands. Shortly after the breaching, Zululand received heavy rains and the mighty Mfolozi River carried all that water to our way through the Msunduze back channel. Hence, February 2021 saw worse floods, though none compares to the ones we are seeing with at the moment; about 90% of farmland in Sokhulu is submerged this time!

What Intermediary Action Would Alleviate the Situation?

12. For the farmlands to drain, this is proposed;
  - 12.1. Cleaning of Msunduze channel
  - 12.2. Opening of the St Lucia Estuary mouth
  - 12.3. Maintenance of the estuary i.e. implement the 1.6m above mean sea level for natural breach going forward OR buy us a farm to share than keep your swamp!
13. We now hang our hopes in this Parliament to see justice being served. Thank you