



# OKACOM

The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission  
Comissão Permanente das Águas da Bacia Hidrográfica do Rio Okavango



## MEDIA RELEASE

15 July 2021

### Member States of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin Commit to Working Together to Ensure Environmental Principles are Upheld

**Gaborone, Botswana.** The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) [Council of Commissioners](#) representing the riparian states of Angola, Botswana and Namibia recently convened to discuss the oil and gas exploration activities of Canadian based company ReconAfrica, in the transboundary Cubango-Okavango River Basin (CORB) which is shared by the three countries. Mandated by the three member states to advise on the conservation, development and sustainable utilisation of water resources in the CORB, OKACOM organised the Council meeting specifically to discuss the explorative activities based in the north-east of Namibia and north-west of Botswana to determine the presence of oil and gas. ReconAfrica's activities not only resulted in national and regional concern, but has also attracted international attention with fears of adverse environmental impact on the Basin, both in the short term and long term. Media reports have highlighted the concern of potentially affected stakeholders such as the communities living within the Basin.

Firstly, the Commission recognises the legitimacy of Petroleum Exploration License PEL073 and PEL001 issued to ReconAfrica by the relevant authorities in both Namibia and Botswana respectively, both of which are at varying stages. Both governments, through the Ministries responsible for mining and energy, have issued official statements stating that the explorative activities are well within environmentally safe boundaries and do not pose any harm to the Basin. In advising members states on issues affecting the environmental integrity of the Basin, the Commission has to ensure that this status is sustained by member states individually and jointly through adhering to agreed key principles with regards to any major developments in the basin including these exploration activities.

#### A Shared Vision for the CORB

The CORB is internationally renowned for its significantly high biological productivity and iconic biodiversity, making it one of the most important biodiversity conservation areas in the world. Hence, its status as a Wetland of International Importance (a Ramsar site) and a 1000th World Heritage site under the UNESCO Convention. In light of this the Commission re-affirmed its commitment to uphold a shared vision for the Basin which states that all efforts





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will be employed to achieve an “economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally healthy development of the Cubango-Okavango River Basin”.

## **Adherence to Environmental Impact Assessment Processes**

The Member States reported that a key objective and commitment is to ensure that ongoing and proposed prospecting activities are done outside of the core and buffer zones of the delineated protected conservation areas as provided for in their respective environmental legislations, and ReconAfrica will need to comply as indicated in their project plans.

This is to be enforced through the respective ministries responsible for water and environment, and further to the member states will make an effort to ensure that their respective Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) legislations and approaches are harmonized and synchronized in order to ensure comparability of results. The Council agreed that an approved EIA report should precede any subsequent stages of the exploration work and if found at any stage that there is a significant threat to the integrity of the Basin and the local communities, the process should be duly suspended.

## **Notification, Consultation and Negotiation on Planned Measures in the Basin**

The process of [Notification, Consultation and Negotiation \(NCN\)](#) of riparian states regarding planned measures that could cause transboundary impacts is closely related to the obligation of prevention of ‘significant harm’. In light of the current explorative activities taking place, the prevention of ‘significant harm’ and ‘significant adverse effects’ to co-riparian states has become a key management aim between all three Member States. The basic principle requiring States not to permit the causing of significant harm to other riparian states is laid down in international conventions, in customary international law, in national legal regulations and/or in cooperation agreements of countries sharing river basins. Thus, each Member State concerned should prepare and submit relevant information and notification to other Member States in the Basin as soon as possible in line with the forgoing legislations and guidelines. Further to this the relevant Ministers should be involved and adequately briefed and advised on the status of these initiatives for them to make the necessary decisions as appropriate and guide the process.





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## Stakeholder Consultations

The Commission duly agreed that stakeholder consultation, involvement and subsequent agreement should be pre-requisite for any further work in relation to oil and gas exploration in the Basin. All member states will ensure that this is fully implemented at all stages of the process through the relevant ministries. Stakeholder consultation is key in safeguarding the participation and involvement of communities and other affected parties within the Basin and should be documented and done transparently.

The Commission commits that it will ensure the gains that have been achieved by the Basin over the more than 25 years of the tripartite existence are not reversed by activities that may negatively affect the wellbeing of the Basin and its communities. As an advisory body to the three Member States, OKACOM not only commits to ensuring that comprehensive monitoring of the process is undertaken, but will act in convening the necessary meetings and platforms for discussion and information sharing from Member States.

END

Issued by

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*The Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) is a River-Basin Organisation, established by the governments of Angola, Botswana and Namibia under the 1994 Agreement, with the mandate to advise the three Member States on the conservation, development and sustainable utilisation of water resources in the Cubango-Okavango River Basin. The Council of Commissioners is the principal organ of OKACOM comprising of representatives from each member state, responsible for defining and guiding the development of policy and general supervision of the activities of OKACOM.*

