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Manuel says DMR must “clean up act” as Cape project wins permit

FORMER finance minister, Trevor Manuel, has demanded the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) “clean up its act” referring specifically to the controversial granting of a permit to mine phosphate next to the Langebaan Lagoon – part of the West Coast National Park.

Addressing the Joburg Indaba being held in Sandton today, Manuel cited the “inconsistent application of regulations” by the DMR with specific reference to the Elandsfontein phosphate mine on the southern edge of the Langebaan Lagoon which is about 120km north of Cape Town.

Describing the entire ecosystem around Langebaan Lagoon as “environmentally sensitive”, Manuel asked: “How was it granted a permit to operate when there’s no water licence agreement for that mine in that place?”

“How do these things happen? What are we to assume about the way in which decisions are taken? So I want to turn to the Department of Mineral Resources and say: you have got to clean up your act.

“You absolutely have to clean up your act because you cannot deal with the absence of policy and depend on the favours accorded by the Minister or the DG (director general) or the regional director.

“On that basis we will not have a mining industry in future because this link between what we do right now – and our responsibility as stewards of depleting resources – is not an obligation that we can fulfil to society.

“We must turn to the department as representatives of government; as key custodians of our environmental resources and say – you cannot conduct yourself in this way – because you may be enriching a few but you are destroying the industry and livelihood of too many people”.

Responding to Manuel’s speech, conference chairman, Bernard Swanepoel, encouraged journalists to carry out investigative reporting into the Elandsfontein mine telling Manuel: “It’s in your backyard and it’s clearly irritating you. I want to read more about that.”