

Mine thrown a lifeline

TENDELE coal mine near Mtubatuba is to expand soon. The anthracite colliery plans to open two more open-cast pits in the Mpukunyoni Tribal Authority in northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Tendele business development manager Nathi Kunene said the opening of new pits would extend the life of the mine by three years.

"This expansion is necessary for the mine to continue operating as the current reserves are nearing completion, and to ensure it can continue to employ the 1 500 people and invest in the community through corporate social responsibility projects," he said.

The mine has four open-cast pits in which 1 200 people are employed directly and about 300 indirectly.

THE PLAN IS GOOD NEWS FOR WORKERS BUT NOT FOR ACTIVISTS, WRITES GIVEN MAJOLA

More than 83% of the workers are locals.

While this is good news for the regional economy, environmental activists are not happy about the mining company's operations in the area, the planned expansion and the migration of operations.

The Global Environmental Trust (GET) has applied for a court interdict to get the company to cease operations, citing damage to the environment and alleging it has breached environmental by-laws.

Tendele confirmed that the environmental group had taken it to court. Although a hearing was due to

take place this month, Kunene said the court had pronounced on the case and found the company was "not at fault".

The expansion is planned for the Emalahleni and Ophondweni areas, affecting 58 and 66 households, respectively, who will have to move.

Somkhele mine is operated by 80%-owned subsidiary Tendele Coal Mining, with 20% held by a trust for the benefit of the community and employees.

Tendele chief operating officer Jarmi Steyn said they had budgeted for the relocation of the people affected and opening up a box cut

for mining, which required large capital investment.

"Should these areas not materialise, the mine could shut and more than 1 200 people would lose their jobs," said Steyn.

Tendele mines anthracite coal, which is sold mainly to the domestic ferrochrome market for stainless steel production.

Steyn said that the export products were sold to various markets overseas.

"The new pits will merely replace those nearing completion; so the client base will remain the same."

Goodwill Mkhwanazi, the Mpukunyoni Traditional Council member responsible for mining, said they would work hard to help create job opportunities for the 200 000-plus community.