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UK firm Searcher gets the nod for seismic survey off SA's West Coast

news24

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West Coast fishing communities hold a demonstration against seismic surveys, outside the Western Cape High Court.

The Green Connection

Geoscience data company Searcher has been granted environmental authorisation to conduct a seismic survey off the coast of SA.

Civil society group, The Green Connection plans to appeal the decision.

This is Searcher's second attempt at a seismic survey off the West Coast.

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Geoscience data company Searcher, which was previously blocked from conducting a seismic survey off the West Coast, may get a second chance now that it has been granted environmental authorisation by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE).

Last year West Coast fishing communities **successfully blocked** Searcher's first attempt at a survey through the courts on the grounds that the company had not adequately consulted interested and affected parties – the small-scale fishers.

Searcher's Robin Sutherland **would later admit** that there were "deficiencies" in the company's previous consultation processes. The company is headquartered in the UK.

Searcher **in July 2022 published a notice** of its second application for a survey. This time it would be conducted further from the coast (more than 200km) than the previous application, which was just 20km off the coast.

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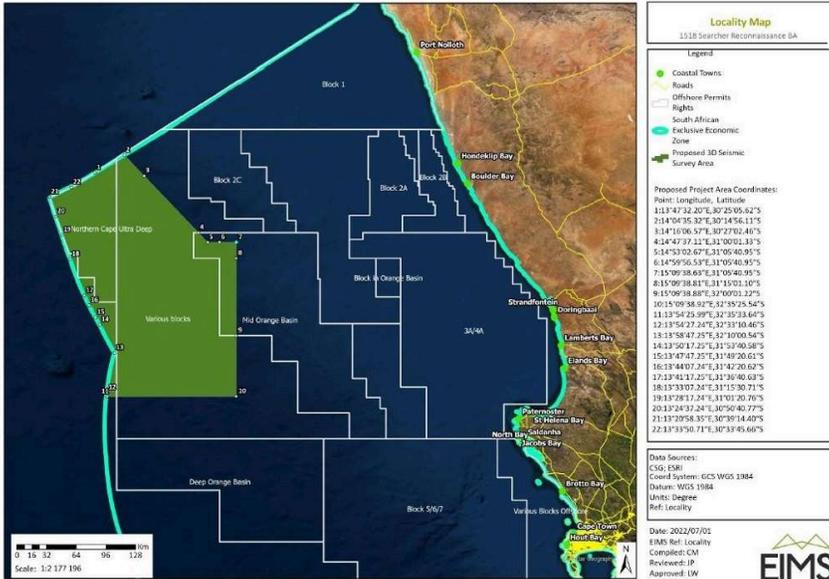
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Searcher invited the public to register as interested and affected parties so that they would be aware and participate in the consultation processes that form part of the environmental authorisation application.



This survey area is between St Helena Bay and Hondeklip Bay off the West Coast. Supplied EIMS

The controversy around seismic surveys is that they involve emitting sound pulses in the water to map out oil and gas reserves. The alleged environmental harm of these sound pulses on marine life has been raised as an argument against seismic surveys in court applications by those opposed to them.

More so, concerns have also been raised about the long-term impact of burning oil and gas on global warming, which exacerbates climate change.

In a notice published on 6 January 2023, Searcher's environmental assessment practitioner, Environmental Impact Management Services, issued a notice indicating the company was granted environmental authorisation.

"Notice is given in terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations ... that the abovementioned project was granted an Environmental Authorisation on the 20 December 2022 by the Department of Mineral Resources," the notice read.

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