

# New chief aims to take Kropz into Africa

● *Eye on broader strategy in plant nutrient minerals*

**Allan Seccombe**  
Resources Writer

Under the new leadership of Ian Harebottle as CE designate, a privately held company called Kropz will use its nearly completed Elandsfontein phosphate mine in the Western Cape to launch a broader African strategy in plant nutrient minerals, starting with a possible purchase in Ghana.

Harebottle worked closely with Michael Nunn, the 70% owner of Kropz, at Afgem, which was later called Tanzanite One. Harebottle said on Tuesday that as a condition of his joining, he had demanded the new company agree to broaden its asset base into Africa and not rely on just the Elandsfontein mine, which has come up against stiff headwinds from environmentalists concerned about its effect on the Langebaan lagoon on the West Coast.

Kropz has suspended Elandsfontein, in which it has invested \$120m, citing low phosphate prices, which declined to a 10-year low during

2017, and a temporarily suspended water use licence.

Using this delay, Kropz management has revisited the design of its plant and has made a number of engineering changes for which it has to raise capital, the quantum of which both Harebottle and technical director Michelle Lawrence declined to comment on. They said they wanted to be in production before the end of 2018. The plant needed some modular additions and tweaks, said Lawrence.

Harebottle said the Kropz board was considering various funding options. While raising capital to finesse the plant and supply offtake contracts with local and foreign buyers of 1.35-million tonnes a year of phosphate rock is one risk to the project, another is the environmental opposition to the project.

The mine lies on an ancient aquifer that feeds into the Langebaan lagoon. Kropz has sunk 36 boreholes upstream of the mine, pumping water out of the aquifer, preventing water from flowing into the mine, diverting it in a closed system

and injecting it back into the aquifer downstream of the mine. The West Coast Environmental Protection Association has lodged appeals against the mining right granted to Kropz and the water use licence.

Lawrence and Harebottle were sanguine and reiterated that Kropz intended to be in production before the end of 2018. The regional office of the Department of Mineral Resources had on receipt of the appeal reviewed the environmental issues and permit, concluded it should remain in force and sent the recommendation to Mineral Resources Minister Mosebenzi Zwane to uphold the Kropz mining right, said Lawrence.

Kropz spoke to Water and Sanitation Minister Nomvula Mokonyane and got permission to handle water in terms of the water use licence until the appeal was concluded, she said.

The environmentalists have launched a court action to prevent water use by the mine until the appeal is finalised.

seccombea@bdlive.co.za