



Protection. Sand mining at Lugumba Landing Site in Wakiso District. Nema has rejected a Chinese investor's application to excavate sand on Lake Victoria shores.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

Nema turns down Chinese investor's sand mining bid

Profitable. Sand mining has of recent become a lucrative business due to the swiftly growing construction sector.

BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU
& AL-MAHDI SSENKABIRWA
editorial@ug.nationmedia.com

WAKISO. The National Environmental Authority (Nema) has rejected a proposal by a Chinese company to excavate sand along the shores of Lake Victoria at Kawuku in Nkumba Parish, Wakiso District.

The company, Mango Tree Group Ltd, has since last year been in the spot over allegedly engaging in illegal sand mining activities in the area.

The company directors, however, sought official clearance from Nema,

to conduct commercial sand mining at three sites on the lake shores at Nkumba, next to Kimi Island in Mukono District and near Kavejanja-Buusi Island, Wakiso District.

According to Nema Executive Director, Tom Okurut, the company's activities have a negative impact on the eco-system on the lake shores, which would consequently affect the communities around Entebbe peninsular.

In his June 1 letter to Mango Tree Group directors, Dr Okurut stressed that the sites proposed for dredging are either "refugia (an area where various organisms can hide during harsh conditions) and/or spawning grounds for fish".

He said Kimi Island is a tilapia breeding area, while Buusi and Nkumba are Nile-tilapia breeding and nursery

areas respectively and also active fishing grounds which cannot be tampered with.

"...the Nkumba and Buusi bay areas are targeted for cage fish farming so such a disturbance will impact fish stocks, the fishing industry, and consequently the livelihood of dependent communities," he said, adding, "In light of the aforementioned and the general purpose for which the projects were conceived, we found that the conditions for which a waiver under Section 34 (2) of the National Environment Act, CAP 153 is granted, are not met, therefore, this Authority has not accepted your application for approval to dredge the proposed sites on Lake Victoria for sand."

Mr Okurut said their field inspection of both Kimi Island and Nkumba area, revealed that the shoreline near Kimi Island has no sand, as the investor claimed and wondered why they are interested in the site.

The inspection of the sites conducted between April 10 and 12 this year was jointly done by Nema and the Directorate of Fisheries, Directorate of Geological Survey and Mines and Operation Wealth Creation.

Mango Tree Group Company Ltd had initially been granted a licence by Uganda Investment Authority to build ships, a port and ship yard at Kawuku and it is not clear how they ventured into sand dredging on the lake shores.

The dredger, which the company had so far built, had started dredging ship channels on the lake bed to open the water ways -which Nema says is dangerous to the aquatic ecosystem.

The dredger recently caught fire while being tested on the lake.

When contacted on Wednesday, Mr Stephen Cheng, the general manager of Mango Tree Group, said they were still in negotiations with Nema to discuss possibilities of okaying the project.

"It's true our application was rejected, but right now, we have meetings with the Nema officials to see whether our application can be accepted," he said.

Mr Emmanuel Kintu, a resident of Kasanja village in Wakiso District, said the investor had scooped all the sand on the shores rendering it dangerous for residents to walk or swim in such areas.

Wakiso District chairperson Matia Lwanga Bwanika commended Nema for taking what he described as a brave step towards restoring the degraded lakeshore.

"I have been fighting alone, but I am happy that Nema has come on board," he said yesterday.