

Govt to proceed with controversial project

By Samuel Kamndaya

The Government will go ahead with its Lake Natron soda ash project despite a welter of criticism from conservationists.

Environmentalists across the world have told the Government to stop the project because it will wipe out East Africa's lesser flamingos.

They say the region's African lesser flamingos breed there.

But Tourism and Natural Resources minister Jumanne Maghembe (pictured) told journalists in Dar es Salaam yesterday that benefits of undertaking the project to alleviate poverty outweighed demerits.

"If they don't want us to carry out the project, then they should give us amounts of money equivalent to cash flows which we would get from the project yearly," Prof Maghembe said.

Tanzania will be exploiting half of one million tonnes yearly of the lake's soda ash.



"We did not ask for the whole one million tonnes in one year.

We just want to mine half of it.

Environmental impact assessments indicate that we can mine 500,000 tonnes a year for up to 200 years without causing any environmental problems," he said.

He said the project, which

is being undertaken by the State Mining Corporation, would demarcate a place of mining soda ash and that for flamingo breeding.

"The soda ash will be transported through an underground route to Tanga.

How can one anticipate such a project to disturb the breeding processes of flamingos?" he said.

The project will involve pumping 530 cubic metres of brine hourly, and produce for export half a million tonnes of sodium carbonate annually.

There may also be an 11.5-megawatt coal-fired plant and a residential complex for 152 permanent and 1,225 construction workers.

He also said the Government was aiming at attracting more investors in the hospitality industry.

"We are discussing with the government of France and with the CRDB Bank to see how we can offer loans to Tanzanians who already own hotels so that they can upgrade them to international standards," he said.