

NuStar expansion plan will change Statia's face forever

By Suzanne Koolega

ST. EUSTATIUS--The NuStar oil terminal expansion plan in St. Eustatius is a clear example of a clash between business interests and development, and nature and cultural and archaeological heritage on a limited amount of land. On a small island like St. Eustatius with a fragile economy, the impact of a multimillion-dollar investment is even bigger.

NuStar Energy L.P., owner of 90 terminal and storage facilities around the world, wants to expand, invest and make a profit, as all businesses do. Statia Terminals hasn't applied for a building permit yet, but is seriously looking at possibilities to construct 31 storage tanks of different sizes in the Cul de Sac area, locally known as The Farm, in addition to a new jetty (see related article).

There is a demand for more storage capacity in St. Eustatius, said NuStar's Vice-president International Terminal Operations David Smith and Mike McDonald, General Manager of NuStar's facility in St. Eustatius.

"St. Eustatius and NuStar are popular for bunkering," they said. Some 800 vessels come to St. Eustatius per year to bunker and obtain fuel. These vessels stay out at sea. More than 100 ships come to the jetty annually to discharge and take on crude oil and petroleum products.

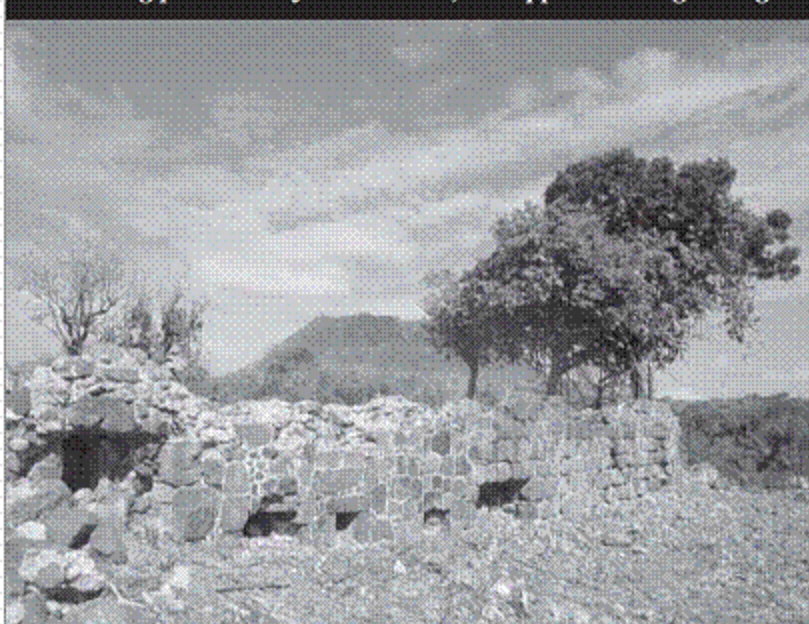
An expansion of 31 tanks would mean an increase of more than 50 per cent of the terminal's current capacity of 67 storage tanks that can hold more than 13 million barrels, with another five tanks being built at this time. The proposed work would take up some 278,000 square metres of space.

Monuments Director Walter Hellebrand and other opponents of an oil terminal in The Farm area find this is quite a lot for the proposed location which is in the only usable seven square kilometres of the island where people live, work and enjoy recreation.

International negotiations

The fact is that international oil companies are interested in renting the new storage tanks. NuStar has been negotiating lease agreements with these

~ Building permit not yet submitted, but opposition is growing ~



The ruins of Bidders Plantation. Photo by Walter Hellebrand.



The property where NuStar wants to build a second terminal. Photo courtesy of NuStar.



Trenches were dug to facilitate archaeological research. (Suzanne Koolega photo)

"NuStar is here to stay. We won't go away just like that. Business is good. We are responsible owners with an excellent track record," added McDonald.

Whether the project goes ahead depends on several other factors, the approval by the local government on a building permit request being a key aspect. Several Dutch Government ministries will be involved in the decision-making process, providing advice and support, but the ultimate decision is in the hands of Statia's Government.

Negative consequences

Local heritage foundations are squarely against the construction of the tanks in the proposed area. The St. Eustatius Awareness and Development (SEAD) movement, Statia Roots Foundation (SRF) and Statia Monuments Foundation said there would be negative environmental, safety and historical consequences.

Statians are becoming increasingly concerned about what the expansion at The Farm would mean for their quality of life. There are fears that the people would be adversely affected, as well as the island's natural and aesthetic beauty. Residents living close to the proposed building site are concerned about their health.

People are worried about the risks of so many tanks close to their homes, schools, workplace, sports places. Not to mention that the island's vital facilities like the airport, hospital, harbour and government are located not far away.

Stringent requirements

NuStar said people should not worry about risks, as the facility would be built according to the very stringent Dutch PGS 29 building code which dictates that the tanks have to be at a certain distance from each other. The company said there would be no risk of a large fire, because safety measures would prevent this from happening.

Each tank will be surrounded by a dike with an area that can contain 110 per cent of the contents of the tank to prevent spilling. A vapour recovery system will be included to control and recover possible vapours, explained McDonald. He stressed that the

terminal was not a refinery.

As for the visual aspect, the tanks will be camouflaged as much as possible using natural colours and by planting vegetation. The plan was adapted, in accordance with the wishes of the Island Government, to accommodate the runway safety area. The tanks will now be moved more into the hill in the back, for which excavation will be necessary.

SEAD and SRF are making citizens more aware of their rights and this is working, because more and more Statians are becoming vocal on the issue. The court injunction initiated by the Monuments Foundation to prevent the project attracted the people's attention. The foundation may have lost the injunction, but Judge indicated that areas of archaeological value might not be destroyed.

Mobilising people

"The result is that Bidders Plantation will remain intact. But more important, we managed to mobilise many people. It was a signal to the people that they have a right to object when they don't agree with something," said Hellebrand.

The Monuments Foundation's appeal against a possible oil terminal in The Farm area still has to be dealt with in court. The organisations certainly will make use of other legal procedures against a change of the spatial development plan to designate the area in question as an industrial area.

SEAD, SRF and the Monuments Foundation sought help from the United Nations Environmental, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) in July.

SEAD coordinator Kenneth Cuvalay said the organisation had started a door-to-door campaign and an online petition

(www.change.org/petitions/st-eustatius-government-nustar-energy-lp-stop-nustar-oil-terminal-expansion-in-the-farm-area) in July against the construction of a second terminal at The Farm.

So far the petition has yielded more than 500 signatures. SEAD will be launching the Weblog <http://no-to-nustar-expansion-steustatius.blogspot.com> soon.

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