



# The way *forward*

Although not without its challenges, the current rapid expansion of infrastructure in the country is placing pressures on the environment and requires constant oversight to ensure adequate protection of environmental resources.

## Future challenges

A number of challenges face the environment sector as it moves from a period of major environmental law reform into the implementation of the new legislation and regulatory approaches.

The law reform process has developed a comprehensive suite of legislation, much of it contained within the framework of NEMA. Implementing the framework poses an important challenge. There will also be significant changes in the intergovernmental allocation of regulatory authority over the waste management sector. These call for more of a focus on intergovernmental cooperation and coordination.

An important element of this is to ensure that subnational spheres of government have sufficient financial resources to address their new regulatory responsibilities. There are, however, uncertainties about the costs of new regulatory approaches. The sector faces the challenge of having to rapidly grasp the implementation requirements and costs of new regulations, as well as finding sufficient resources.

A shortage of skills and human resource capacity constraints hinder effective environmental management. The sector faces the challenge of significantly improving the skills level of existing personnel and retaining them. The environmental management inspectorate (EMI) accreditation process is beginning to address this challenge in relation to environmental compliance and enforcement. However, there are gaps in specialist technical areas, such as air quality monitoring.

The environmental sector is responding to the concerns identified in AsgiSA around the impact of inefficient environmental and other regulations. New regulations as well as a greater focus on human resource capacity are beginning to speed up the EIA process, while retaining its environmental integrity.

While there have been significant improvements in environmental impact management processes and media-specific regulations, there have not been comparable improvements in ensuring compliance with these regulations. DEAT's enforcement unit, the 'Green Scorpions', has made some headway, but compliance monitoring and enforcement remains patchy and inconsistent in the national and provincial sphere and is an important medium-term challenge for the sector.

Global climate change has been identified as a major threat to the stability of local ecosystems and natural resources. While the country can help global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it is generally accepted that some climate disruption is likely. Understanding the vulnerability of the country to climate change and supporting appropriate adaptation measures is a necessity.

The impact of climate change will require action by a range of sectors. The environment sector faces the challenge of providing effective leadership to guide and coordinate efforts across government and society to address the impacts of climate change.