



South Africa is ranked as the fifth best marketed tourism destination in the world.

BOOSTING TOURISM GROWTH

South African Tourism is the national tourism agency tasked with marketing South Africa internationally as a preferred tourist destination. SA Tourism's broad objectives, as outlined in the Tourism Act, are to increase tourism's contribution to the GDP, create jobs and transform the industry to become truly representative of our nation. Six key objectives have been defined to meet these challenges:

- Drive volume and increase the numbers of tourists visiting South Africa
- Increase tourist spending while in the country
- Increase the average length of stay
- Increase the average number of provinces visited by each tourist (currently at 1,5 provinces per tourist)
- Address the challenge of seasonality
- Transform the industry through Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiatives like the Tourism Charter and Scorecard.

SA Tourism enjoyed another successful year in 2006/7. The key achievements are outlined below.

GROWTH IN TOURISM ARRIVALS

Tourism arrivals again showed outstanding growth during the period under review. For the calendar year 2006, SA Tourism projected a growth of 6.7% in arrivals over the previous year. The January to September figures show growth of around 14.5%, more than double the target. Regional figures are outlined in the table below:

Region	Total Arrivals	Growth
Europe	927 402	4.6%
North America	226 381	9.7%
Central and South America	39 493	11.4%
Australasia	77 240	11.8%
Asia	137 255	4.5%
Middle East	27 262	6.3%
Africa mainland	4 597 258	18.2%
Total	6 055 726	14.5%



The popular Sho't Left campaign continues to drive domestic tourism growth.

Based on the available figures to September 2006, the projection is that the total number of arrivals will grow to around 8.3 million. This will represent the first time that arrivals statistics have passed the eight (8) million threshold.

SA Tourism is naturally delighted at the statistics, not just from the total arrivals perspective, but also from a balanced portfolio perspective. Historically, our tourism figures have been dependent on Europe as a strong market. The growth in particularly the North American market, but also the South American, Asian and Australasian markets has helped to diversify South Africa's tourism portfolio.

The arrivals figures also contribute to SA Tourism's other main objective, which is to grow tourism's contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 2nd Quarter statistics indicate that the average tourist spent R5 530, that the average length of stay was for eight (8) nights, and that the most visited provinces were Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape.

The projections are that tourism spend will contribute approximately R94 billion into the national economy in 2006, representing growth of around 8%. This figure includes returns on domestic tourism.

GROWTH IN DOMESTIC TOURISM

Internationally, successful tourist destinations have a very strong domestic base, with approximately 70% domestic tourism and 30% international. South Africa differs substantially from this ideal model, as the balance is around 60% international, 40% domestic.

South African Tourism aims to correct this imbalance, not just to be in line with the international norm, but also to create a more traveled and better informed population. This is primarily due to the country's

history, and the denial of travel opportunities to the black majority under apartheid.

Education is SA Tourism's main thrust in encouraging South Africans to travel locally. In this regard, the continuation of the successful and popular Sho't Left television campaign was a highlight.

BUILDING THE BRAND

Marketing South Africa as a desirable destination for international travelers is a key priority to sustain tourism growth, and one of South African Tourism's main activities. The goal is to establish South Africa as a 'top of mind' destination - consistently among the top three destinations from over two hundred (200) competing nations - via the "It's Impossible" brand.

In December, 2006, the independent travel industry magazine Conde Nast Traveler ranked South Africa as the fifth most desirable tourist destination in the world. Only Australia, China, India and Thailand featured ahead of South Africa in this international ranking. Considering that South Africa's global branding campaign has been just a five year project, the climb up the international rankings has been a notable achievement.

Branding goes hand in hand with marketing. SA Tourism only has twelve (12) foreign offices, while the Department of Foreign Affairs has presence in one hundred and eighty-one (181) countries. During 2006, SA Tourism worked to align its efforts with Foreign Affairs, by providing marketing material to Foreign Affairs outlets. This serves to ensure that South Africa is marketed with a consistent 'look and feel' internationally, and provides the maximum return on investment in marketing material like posters, pamphlets and tourist guides.



Tourism is acknowledged as the best-prepared sector for the 2010 World Cup.

THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND 2010

Of all the sectors involved in preparations for the 2010 Soccer World Cup tournament, tourism is widely acknowledged to be the most advanced in preparedness. Tourism was the first sector to submit its complete sector plan for 2010. During the year, there were more significant highlights towards finalising 2010 arrangements.

The first was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with FIFA to include, for the first time ever, non-hotel accommodation establishments as official suppliers to a Soccer World Cup tournament. This includes private game reserves, B&Bs and guest lodges - on the proviso that they are graded by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa.

The MoU negotiated with FIFA holds several benefits for tourism and the country in general. Firstly, it will help to mark the 2010 World Cup as a truly African experience, offering the best of our wildlife, cultural and other attractions to visitors. The MoU also ensures that the benefits of the tournament will also be enjoyed by the SMME operators who typically run non-hotel accommodation establishments.

The National Tourism Skills Development Conference, held at Muldersdrift in October, 2006, also boosted 2010 preparedness. The conference produced a clear Plan of Action of how the tourism industry will work with labour, government and communities to ensure that rare and scarce skills needs are met for 2010 and beyond.

The SA Tourism Board also approved the formation of the 2010 Unit within SA Tourism, tasked with implementing the 2010 plan.

AIRLIFT CAPACITY

Another key to sustaining growth in South Africa's tourism industry is the provision of enough airline seats to meet demand. Currently, there are not enough seats available for the country to fulfill its tourism potential. During the period under review, SA Tourism together with DEAT contributed to a new Aviation Policy, drafted by the Department of Transport.

Previous policies did not recognise tourism growth as being a major part of South Africa's national interest. This has been addressed in the new policy, and tourism needs will now top the agenda in airlift negotiations with other countries. During the first six months of implementing the new Aviation Policy, more than one thousand (1 000) new seats per week have been provided for international travelers wanting to visit South Africa.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

South African Tourism draws pride from its status as a highly professional world class marketing institution representative of South African values. All employment equity targets have been met and the multicultural team is a role model for what South African companies can achieve.

South African Tourism has also developed a world class research division. In 2006, R30 million was spent on destination market intelligence gathering, analysis and dissemination. The division can compete with the best anywhere, and has gathered the best travel and tourism information database on Africa.



Increasing airlift capacity and improving visa conditions are important in growing the tourism sector.

Training is another important aspect of development. SA Tourism spent R4 million on training during 2006, resulting in 60% of all staff undergoing training during the year.

CHALLENGES

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Crime remains a key obstacle to tourism growth. Although there is no such thing as a crime-free travel destination, safety and security are top priorities for travelers. The negative publicity around South Africa's ongoing high crime rate continues to impact on tourism. While SA Tourism has no direct control over safety and security, the organisation continues to support all initiatives to mitigate the problem.

VISAS

Foreign offices are the first point of contact for most foreign visitors, when they apply for visas to visit South Africa. In order to promote the image of South Africa as a world class tourist destination, it is imperative that

visa applicants enjoy consistent and excellent service standards, wherever they may apply.

Again, SA Tourism cannot control the process, as visas are handled by the Department of Home Affairs. However, the organisation will continue to lobby for uniformly excellent service standards in foreign visa offices. Australia is currently the leader in this field, which is part of the reason why Australia is the leading tourism brand globally. SA Tourism will be aiming to emulate Australian service levels.

PLANS FOR 2007/8

Increasing arrivals and tourist spend are again the key priorities for the next reporting period. The targets are to grow arrivals by 4.5%, in line with our national goal of ten (10) million visitors annually by 2010, and to increase tourist spend by 10%. This will add another R9.5 billion approximately to the national economy.

Growing the tourism brand will be the other main priority for 2007/8. The longer-term goal is to establish South Africa internationally as a 'top of mind' destination by 2014.



The new grading system benchmarks the quality of the whole tourism experience, not just tourist facilities.

QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR A QUALITY TOURISM DESTINATION

The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) is a public/private partnership tasked with developing and managing a quality assurance system for the tourism industry in South Africa. This is achieved through grading the full range of tourism facilities, including hotels, restaurants, conference venues, bed & breakfasts, guest houses, lodges and even tourist transport services.

Although the grading scheme implemented by the Grading Council works on the universally familiar one-five star scale, it is not limited to a rigid and prescriptive assessment of the facilities offered. Instead, TGCSA grading is based on the facilities, the range of services offered, and the level to which these services are rendered. The result is a grading scheme that offers a benchmark of the whole tourism experience, not just the level of facilities.

PREPARATIONS FOR 2010

During the National Accommodation Conference held during October, 2006, the formal announcement was made that the Tourism Grading Council will be the official quality assurance partner for MATCH, the company facilitating ticketing and accommodation on behalf of FIFA for the 2010 Soccer World Cup. FIFA is understandably insistent that World Cup visitors should be provided with reliable benchmarks for accommodation facilities, and the Grading Council's rating system fits the bill.

The announcement followed a year of high-level negotiations which included Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, and confirms that FIFA has every confidence in the local grading system. The announcement also served as a great inducement to all potential 2010 establishments to become graded, as non-graded facilities will not be considered for the tournament.



4 890 accommodation establishments had been graded by the end of 2006.

This, in turn, led to increased requests by establishments to be graded. The year's grading statistics (to December, 2006) are outlined below:

Province	Total Number of Accommodation Establishments as at 31/12/2004	Total Number of Graded Establishments as at 31/12/2006	%
Eastern Cape	463	524	113%
Free State	444	249	56%
Gauteng	826	606	73%
KwaZulu Natal	1624	671	41%
Limpopo	570	301	53%
Mpumalanga	472	343	73%
Northern Cape	677	312	43%
North-West	460	288	68%
Western Cape	2954	1596	54%
Total	8490	4890	58%

Table B: Percentage of Rooms Graded According to Accommodation Type Countrywide

Accommodation Type	Total Rooms	Rooms Graded	%
Hotels	61921	34376	56%
B&B; Guest Houses; Country Houses	19128	18657	98%
Self-Catering & Caravan & Camping	28237	19673	70%
Game Reserves; Hunting Lodges	14899	8373	56%
Backpackers & Youth Hostels	5000	1729	35%
Total	129185	86375	67%

The Grading Council has achieved satisfactory capacity, through the appointment of one hundred and forty-three (143) assessors, covering all nine provinces.

GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT TO GRADED ESTABLISHMENTS

During the previous reporting period, national Government committed to only using graded accommodation establishments for its traveling staff and business. During 2006/7, the Grading Council joined DEAT officials on national roadshows to explain the decision and promote compliance among provincial and local government departments. The roadshows were well received, and most provincial and local departments have followed national Government's lead in stipulating the use of only graded establishments for staff.

A particularly pleasing development was the decision by some local authorities to sponsor the cost of grading (usually R1 300) for SMME establishments within their municipalities. Grading is an essential component of business development, and these sponsorships are giving effect to the national priority of poverty alleviation.

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY

People with disabilities are travelers and tourists too, so it is entirely appropriate that accommodation establishments who cater for their needs should be recognised and graded accordingly. At Indaba in May, 2006, the Grading Council announced that it had designed a universal accessibility scheme to rate accessibility for wheelchairs and physical disabilities, as well as sight and hearing impairments.

The scheme was designed in collaboration with organisations representing people with disabilities, and the concept was well received by the industry. The universal access scheme will serve as an add-on to the star grading system, with accessibility denoted by a separate plaque. The plaque will bear icons signifying the type of disabled access facilities (physical, sight, hearing) offered by the establishment.

The scheme includes a searchable database of establishments with universal access, available on the internet. The Grading Council has also trained twenty-three (23) assessors for the universal accessibility scheme. Plans for 2007/8 include rolling out the scheme, and encouraging broad industry participation in the scheme.

OTHER FACILITIES

Following the slow take-up among restaurants for the star grading scheme, the Grading Council reviewed and relaunched the restaurant grading scheme during the period under review. The restaurant sector wanted a grading scheme that differentiated between restaurants and the accommodation establishments graded using the one-five star system.

Accordingly, the restaurant grading was revised to a Bronze/Silver/Gold/Diamond star system. The restaurant sector is not highly structured, so it was difficult to achieve consensus. However, a large portion of the sector agreed with the new system. Grading has recommenced and, although take-up is still slow, it is expected to increase as restaurant owners become more familiar with the grading scheme and its benefits.

Grading of transport services has been hampered by the fact that the National Transportation Act does not differentiate between tourism and commuter transport. As the Grading Council is mandated to deal only with tourism facilities and services, it would create problems if commuter transport services approached the Council to be graded. So the Grading Council requires a legal framework that allows it to focus solely on the grading of tourism transport services.

The Council approached DEAT and the Department of Transport to resolve the matter. As a result, the Department of Transport is currently amending the National Transportation Act to recognise tourism transport as a separate sector. Once this amendment has been concluded, the Council will proceed with grading of tourism transport services. The goal is to have as many tourism transport services as possible graded during the next twelve months.

The grading of conference venues has been disappointingly slow. For conference venue owners, the concept of grading is a novelty. Initially, the conference sector followed the mindset that, internationally, grading applies mostly to accommodation establishments, with some countries also grading restaurants. As the benefits of grading have become evident, it is expected that requests for grading will accelerate.



The 2010 World Cup aims to provide international visitors with a unique and unforgettable African experience.

STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION

The TGCSA website was revamped completely during 2006, to be more sophisticated and responsive to needs. Customer interactions are now electronically received, processed and filed, and the outcome is also communicated electronically to the customer. This has enhanced the Grading Council's internal processes, cutting down on administrative overhead and the use of paper.

To increase consumer awareness, the Council ran four media campaigns during the year. Advertisements were placed in newspapers, magazines and on radio stations such as SAFM, 702 and KFM. Tourists are targeted, particularly visitors to Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The adverts urge holidaymakers to patronise graded establishments, and also to provide feedback to the Council on their tourism experience.

The Council produced its 4th annual Accommodation Guide during 2006/7, which will be launched at Indaba 2007.

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Tourism Grading Council has rapidly gained international standing as an expert in quality assessment and assurance. During the year, the Council was invited to make keynote presentations at two African tourism events.

The first was a United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Quality Assurance Workshop, held in Ethiopia in June. Sixteen (16) African countries attended. In December, this was followed up by a presentation in Maputo, to the Mozambican Tourism Board and all its members.

These events furthered the goal of implementing similar tourism grading schemes in Africa, to ensure that reliable benchmarks apply throughout the continent.

PLANS FOR 2007/8

Now that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed with MATCH, the Grading Council wants to get down to business in the next year, and deliver on the expectations of the MoU. This includes accelerating the grading of establishments, particularly in the 2010 host cities and in the satellite areas within 100km of host cities.

There is also a target to grade as many restaurants as possible and, once the transport legislation is amended, to grade tour bus services. The grading of facilities and services is a key requirement for a successful 2010 World Cup, and the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa is committed to the successful completion of its mandate.



SANBI spearheads the drive to conserve and manage South Africa's biodiversity resources.

PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

The role of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) is to manage the Biodiversity resources of the country in terms of its functions under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA). The core business of SANBI encompasses programmes in research, conservation, sustainable use, biodiversity information systems, education, garden development, horticulture, ecosystems rehabilitation and bioregional planning programmes and policy.

BIODIVERSITY PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

During the period under review, SANBI successfully completed a range of biodiversity planning and assessment projects. These included an assessment of the contribution of municipal nature reserves to meeting national biodiversity targets, which highlighted the crucial role that municipal nature reserves play in conserving biodiversity, and the need for supporting the development of municipal capacity to manage them effectively.

SANBI also supported the initiation of provincial biodiversity plans in two further provinces - Eastern Cape and North West - in line with the requirements of bioregional plans in terms of the Biodiversity Act. North West and the Eastern Cape join Gauteng,

KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga as provinces which have systematic spatial biodiversity plans that identify priority areas for biodiversity using best available science. Other achievements included conservation assessments of South African cycads and Proteaceae.

POLICY SUPPORT

SANBI provided support to DEAT on policy development and implementation, including the development of the National Biodiversity Framework, preparation for listing threatened or protected ecosystems in terms of the Biodiversity Act, and development of guidelines for publishing bioregional plans in terms of the Biodiversity Act. These will enable integrated management of priority terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, many of which fall outside the protected area network, and will help to streamline environmental authorisations, ensuring outcomes that support both conservation and development.

SANBI's research programme continued to provide a strong scientific basis for South Africa's responses to climate change. This included taking a lead on the Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation (IVA) section of DEAT's national Long Term Mitigation Scenarios climate change project, leading components of the International Panel on Climate Change Fourth Assessment Report, and providing scientific support to UNFCCC delegations.

BIOREGIONAL PROGRAMMES

SANBI co-ordinates a suite of bioregional programmes that focus on partnership projects to mainstream biodiversity in socio-economic development. The most recent addition is the Marine Biodiversity Programme, initiated in partnership with the World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa (WWF-SA) and the Marine and Coastal Management Department. The programme focus is on facilitating the establishment of a network of offshore Marine Protected Areas in South Africa's waters, as well as engaging with fisheries and the mining sector.

The Succulent Karoo Ecosystem Programme (SKEP) has established innovative partnerships with De Beers on the Namaqualand coast and with Anglo American Base Metals as part of the Bushmanland Conservation Initiative in the Northern Cape, securing mine owned land in conservation agreements that contribute to national biodiversity targets. In partnership with the Development Bank of SA, Conservation International and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, SKEP has established SKEPPIES, the first ever small grant fund enabling synergy between conservation and local economic development activities.

The Grasslands Programme focuses on mainstreaming biodiversity in production sectors. Demonstration projects underway include rehabilitation of river ecosystems in the Free State, wetland mitigation banking with the coal mining industry in Mpumalanga, securing priority biodiversity sites within urban areas in Gauteng, biodiversity stewardship on farms in the Wakkerstroom area in Mpumalanga, working with the forestry industry to secure 35 000ha of high biodiversity priority for esty-owned land and to ensure that expansion of small grower plantation forestry is underpinned by biodiversity considerations.

The Subtropical Thicket Ecosystem Programme (STEP) has focused on integrating maps of biodiversity priorities into municipal planning and land-use decision-making in the Eastern Cape, including publishing a fully revised STEP Handbook and Mapbook. A training programme for municipalities will be complemented by ongoing one-on-one technical support by SANBI's newly appointed

Biodiversity Advisor in the Eastern Cape. STEP has initiated four biodiversity-related IDP projects in municipalities in the Fish River valley.

Cape Action for People and the Environment (C.A.P.E.) closed off its US\$6 million investment from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, having funded 65 civil society-led projects in the Cape Floristic Region over the five-year investment period. C.A.P.E. continues to roll out the Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable Development Project with an investment of US\$11 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), with a key focus on strengthening cooperative governance for improved biodiversity management in this global biodiversity hotspot.

SANBI gave extensive input into the development of the Woolworths Biodiversity Strategy, through the C.A.P.E., SKEP, STEP and Grasslands programmes.

SANBI's Biodiversity Geographic Information System Unit (BGIS) is expanding its services to provide easy access to biodiversity planning and related information for all South Africa's biomes. Over the past year, the amount of freely available spatial biodiversity information on the BGIS website (<http://bgis.sanbi.org>) has increased substantially, and 1:30 000 satellite imagery for Southern Africa together with a species mapping tool have been loaded onto the site.

BOTANICAL GARDENS

A shop window of South Africa's rich biodiversity is provided by SANBI's network of eight National Botanical Gardens (NBGs). Kirstenbosch, our flagship garden, received over seven hundred and fifty thousand (750 000) visitors during the year, with one hundred and twenty thousand (120 000) of them enjoying the hugely successful Appletiser-sponsored Summer Sunset Concerts. Total garden visitors rose to one million three hundred thousand (1300 000) (4% increase) whilst garden income increased to R24 million. The spectacular landscape, floral diversity, cultural exhibits (including a major collection of Zimbabwean stone sculptures) and the mix of local and international musicians, provides a major draw to local and foreign visitors to the Cape.

Other NBG highlights include the opening of excellent new visitor facilities in the Free State NBG in Bloemfontein. With the continued support of the Expanded Public Works Programme, SANBI is currently developing new tourism facilities at the Karoo Desert NBG (Worcester), Walter Sisulu NBG (Roodepoort/Mogale City), KwaZulu-Natal NBG (Pietermaritzburg) and Harold Porter NBG (Betty's Bay) NBGs. SANBI is also facilitating the upgrade of the Grahamstown Botanical Garden in the Eastern Cape with funds provided by DEAT's Social Responsibility Programme. These labour intensive projects will provide more than 100 new permanent jobs and over 1000 temporary jobs for previously unemployed persons. Education Centres are now fully operational in five of SANBI's national botanical gardens, providing an environmental education service to thousands of learners and educators, particularly from disadvantaged schools in the surrounding region.

A new Geological Garden has been completed in the Walter Sisulu NBG showcasing South Africa's rich geological heritage. A SAPPI-sponsored aerial boardwalk was officially opened in the Lowveld NBG, providing visitors with spectacular canopy-level views in the forested area of the Garden. A new Khoisan Useful Plants Garden was also completed in the Harold Porter NBG.

South Africa's exhibit at the Chelsea Flower Show won the prestigious UK Lawrence Medal (Best Exhibit) award in 2006. The three Western Cape national botanical gardens were awarded a Silver Medal for their exhibits at the SAA/Cape Town Flower Show at Lourensford Estate, Somerset West. SANBI and the Walter Sisulu NBG were also given exposure at two exhibitions: the Yebo Gogga Yebo Amablomo Umuthi show at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Outdoor Living Expo at Clearwater Mall in October 2006.

A comprehensive bird spreadsheet was developed for SANBI's eight national botanical gardens using Southern African Bird Atlas data as well as garden-based data records. Biodiversity walks and talks available to members of the public in various national botanical gardens included subjects such as trees, birds, bats, spiders and snakes. Stargazing events held in various gardens are also popular events.

GREENING THE NATION

Greening the Nation is an Expanded Public Works Programme that is funded by DEAT and has been implemented in various provinces for the past two years by SANBI's Environmental Education Unit. For the 2006/2007 financial year, the following deliverables have been achieved:

- 230 588 person days achieved
- 5 650 job opportunities
- 65 SMMEs created and used in addition to the existing 126 SMMEs
- 35 995 training days, 25 500 of which were for accredited skills based training that was provided by recognised institutions such as Rhodes University, UNISA and Durban University of Technology.
- 180 schools were greened; 255 565m² have been greened in community projects such as cultural villages, police stations, clinics, community parks, day care centres.
- 3 community indigenous plant nurseries have been developed and completed; over 10 000 different fruit trees have been planted in various schools throughout the country; over 25 000 indigenous trees have been planted in schools and community projects. Multi-skilling the interns continue and, of the 24 interns recruited for training so far, 12 have secured permanent jobs.

BOTANICAL GARDENS INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMME AS PART OF EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

The SANBI infrastructure programme has been very successful in 2006/7. For the whole of SANBI the statistics are:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------|
| • Job opportunities | 8 867 |
| • Person days | 660 588 |
| • Training days | 77 595 |

FAUNA

Since 2004, SANBI has responded to its new mandate through the initiation of a suite of projects which will assess and monitor the status of our indigenous fauna. As part of its Threatened Species Programme, SANBI coordinates several atlas projects, which capture records of species occurrences across the country through the participation of hundreds of volunteer members of the public.

Reptiles: More than twenty (20) volunteers joined the South African Reptile Conservation Assessment (SARCA), capturing two thousand and two hundred (2200) photographic records from more than a hundred amateur photographers for the burgeoning online "virtual museum" at www.reptiles.sanbi.org. A field guide to the Chameleons of Southern Africa was published in March 2007. SANBI also coordinated two NRF funded workshops directed toward improving the assessment of South African reptiles. SANBI research on the molecular ecology and systematics of reptiles, frogs and insects expanded in 2006/7 and resulted in several scientific papers that described both new species and genera and contributed to the understanding of their evolution and ecology as a basis for conservation planning and the management of key taxa.

Birds: An agreement was reached with the Avian Demography Unit at University of Cape Town for the support of bird monitoring projects. This forms part of the Birds and Environmental Change Programme launched in 2006 and has two themes - using birds as indicators of ecosystem change and human well-being, and assessing birds' vulnerability and adaptation to environmental change. An agreement was also reached for the management of the South African Bird Atlas 2 project, comprising a three-way partnership between SANBI, BirdLife South Africa, and the Avian Demography Unit.

Other: The launch of the South African National Survey of Arachnida (SANSA) took place in September 2006, and SANBI's Custodians of Rare and Endangered Wildflowers (CREW) has been so successful in its aim to involve local communities in monitoring and conserving their rare and threatened plants that it has now established offices in Pretoria and Pietermaritzburg. An initial assessment was completed of the state of knowledge for indigenous animal

species listed on CITES appendices, or listed in terms of the NEMBA Threatened or Protected Species regulations.

International initiatives: A proposal for a global project on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Pollinators was submitted to the GEF Secretariat for approval in 2006, as part of a seven country initiative (South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Brazil, Nepal, India, Pakistan). SANBI's Global Change Research Group continued to expand the research programme to include studies on the vulnerability of southern African birds, mammals and reptiles to climate change.

Publications: During the review period, SANBI researched and published various plant species catalogues, checklists, maps and books, such as the revised Vegetation map of South Africa, along with Flowering Plants in Sub - Sahara, Wetland Flora in SA, and Zulu Botanical Knowledge. SANBI also published the book Plants of Southern Africa (POSA) and the African Plant Checklist Database (APCD)-Sub Saharan African Flora checklist on the web.

CHALLENGES

SANBI did not meet Employment Equity targets for top and senior management categories. The targets were not met because some positions were not filled during the year under review. The positions will be filled during 2007/2008. The SANBI Board will formulate and implement the transformation strategy.

PLANS FOR 2007/8

The National Biodiversity Framework (to be published by DEAT in early 2007) gives guidance on priority activities for effective management of South Africa's biodiversity, and highlights the need for SANBI to play a lead role in several areas, including policy analysis and engagement, monitoring and reporting on biodiversity, and spatial biodiversity planning. Other major goals include operationalising the National Biodiversity Monitoring and Reporting Framework, and providing recommendations on the National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, based on the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment.



South Africa aims to have 8% of the country's land surface under protection by 2010.

PARKS F O R T H E PEOPLE

South African National Parks (SANParks) is the statutory body responsible for promoting conservation of our natural and cultural heritage through managing the country's network of twenty-two (22) national parks. SANParks also promotes conservation at local, national and international level, and plays an important role in promoting nature-based tourism for both the domestic and international markets.

EXPANDING THE NATIONAL PARKS

Although South Africa is renowned internationally as a country of abundant national parks, we are still short of meeting our national targets for land and sea areas under protection. The 2010 target is to have 8% of our land area and 20% of our coastline under protection. Over the longer term, the total land under formal protection will increase to 12%. These long-term targets translate to around 5.4 million hectares for land (an increase of about 50% on the current conservation estate) and about 1.8 million hectares of marine areas (twenty-eight times the current area under protection).

Expanding our parks (and the tourism and income generation opportunities that go with them) is a key priority for the Department in preparation for the 2010 World Cup, and R181 million has been allocated for land purchases to grow the parks.

During the period under review, a total of twenty-four thousand three hundred and twenty-one (24 321) hectares was added to National Parks. The bulk of this, almost twenty thousand (20 000) hectares, was in the new national park established near Kimberley. The new park replaces the former Vaalbos National Park, which was de-proclaimed following a successful land claim.

Although the new park has yet to be proclaimed, it came into operation in November, 2006. SANParks completed the translocation of wildlife from Vaalbos to the new park in October, and infrastructure development already boasts two lodges with twenty chalets and conference facilities. The new park is expected to be named Mokala National Park, which is SeTswana for 'camelthorn tree'.

In addition, negotiations and offers were made for a further six thousand one hundred and seventy-one (6 171) hectares of land expansion for the Agulhas, Table Mountain and Addo Elephant National Parks. Although these are smaller expansions, they are particularly important in terms of balanced conservation. South Africa's landscape features a number of biomes, some of which are adequately conserved while others are under-conserved. The 2006/7 land acquisitions are in the Thicket and Fynbos biomes, both of which are under-conserved.



R181 million has been allocated to grow the conservation estate in time for the 2010 World Cup.

2006 was a special year for three National Parks - Addo Elephant, Kgalagadi and Bontebok - as all three celebrated the 75th anniversaries of their proclamation. Celebratory functions were held at Kgalagadi and Addo. The Kgalagadi celebration featured tremendous participation by groups from the surrounding San and Mier communities, illustrating the degree to which these communities work together with the Park.

The Addo celebration was combined with the opening of the new southern access road which, for the first time, provides access to the Park from the N2. The Bontebok celebration was postponed until May, when it too will coincide with the launch of an important development - a new rest camp and related infrastructure.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

While the expansion of the national parks serves primarily to ensure that South Africa's biodiversity is adequately protected, the parks also provide a vital function in attracting tourists and creating jobs and income opportunities for communities living adjacent to the parks.

Infrastructure development received a massive and timely boost via the allocation of R574 million of funding to be spent in preparation for 2010 and beyond. 2006/7 was the first year in this four-year project, and was dedicated to planning. Implementation of the project, and its wide scale infrastructure development (particularly in the Kruger National Park), will be a high priority for 2007/8.

Coupled with the R600 million that is being spent on the infrastructure component of the Expanded Public Works Programme, total expenditure on upgrading, as well as new rest camps, tourism roads, fences and other infrastructure, will have exceeded R1 billion by 2010.

In terms of FIFA 2010 accommodation, SANParks signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with MATCH, the ticketing and accommodation Facilitation Company for the tournament. In terms of the agreement, SANParks will supply an accommodation inventory, work towards the development of a reservations hub for protected areas, and work with MATCH to enable the use of the WILD Card as the official visitor card for the FIFA 2010 event.

The grading of tourism facilities is an essential process in preparation for 2010. By the end of the third quarter, 52% of all SANParks accommodation facilities had been graded, with the remainder scheduled to be graded before the end of the reporting period. In a related development, SANParks replaced the restaurant operator in the Kruger National Park, to ensure better service levels in the future, especially during and beyond the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament.

GROWING DOMESTIC TOURISM

Preparations for the huge influx of foreign visitors in 2010 go hand in hand with efforts to grow domestic tourism, especially in opening up national parks to previously disadvantaged communities who were historically denied access. Local tourism statistics to the end of December 2006 show encouraging progress in this regard.

SANParks occupancy rate was at 72% at the end of December, up from 69% at the same time in 2005. The target for this reporting period had been 67%, and all indications are that the target will be exceeded. Similarly, visitor numbers have increased by 9.7%, from just under 2.5 million (2005/6) to 2 737 079 for the period April - December 2006.

SANParks' lodge concession partners also recorded significant gains in occupancy rates which, over April - December, averaged 50.89%, up from 41.37% for the same period in 2005.



South African Parks Week in September promotes the rich heritage of our parks to all South Africans.

This growth was the result of a focused media campaign by SANParks to market its national parks to local holidaymakers. The campaign included advertisements in local travel magazines, a radio campaign spanning nine (9) regional radio stations, participation in six (6) local consumer shows throughout the country, product placement (for Addo, Wilderness and Golden Gate National Parks) on the hit SABC3 series *Isidingo*, participation in SA Tourism's *Sho't Left* campaign, and the marketing of the WILD Card to enable affordable access to national parks.

Focus on key international markets has also increased in line with the SA Tourism marketing strategy, and SANParks has participated in a variety of Trade shows and road shows in these markets.

SANParks also expanded its "Take Kruger to Kassie" project, an awareness raising programme aimed at Mpumalanga and Limpopo communities who live within 50km of the Kruger National Park. During the year, thirty-one (31) trips were undertaken to communities, reaching around eight thousand (8 000) people.

Likewise, the "Kids in Parks" initiative continues to grow, educating our children about the environment in national parks. During the year, forty-seven thousand six hundred and eighty-six (47 686) learners visited the Kruger National Park, with the other twenty-one (21) National Parks hosting a total of forty-one thousand three hundred and ninety-seven (41 397) learners.

National awareness of our parks was also boosted by the launch of South African National Parks Week in September, 2006. During the week, SANParks offered free entrance to all South Africans visiting its parks. Exhibitions were held at the Pretoria head office as well as at individual parks, and special events included an annual oral history project launched by Mapungubwe National Park and a Writing Competition hosted on the SANParks website.

PLANNING AND REPORTING

Knowing the value of our national parks to the economy is important for national planning and priorities. During the reporting period, SANParks conducted an important study to determine the national parks' Macro-Economic Impact on the South African economy. The draft report was circulated for comment and the final report will be released before financial year-end.

In line with the National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act, all national parks are required to submit management plans for approval by the Minister. This process was concluded successfully and all plans submitted during the year. For parks that have not yet been proclaimed, such as the new Mokala National Park, management plans will be drawn up and submitted within one year of proclamation.

The national parks are not only repositories for biodiversity and wildlife, but also contain important cultural sites, such as remnants of early human settlements. SANParks has embarked on a cultural mapping exercise for all national parks. The target was to undertake cultural mapping in four parks during the year, and five were eventually covered - Mountain Zebra, Camdeboo, Addo, Karoo and Marakele. The mapping exercise includes site reports, management plans and the documentation of historical buildings.

Electronic biodiversity management reporting facilitates faster and more efficient reporting by field officials in the parks. SANParks incorporated the Reporting System into its Management Plan Framework, as a key performance measure of biodiversity conservation at park level. The system was initially implemented and tested at Table Mountain, Addo, Camdeboo and Wilderness, with another five parks to be added by the end of the reporting period. A total review of the Reporting System will be carried out at the end of the period.

SANParks also contributed to the DEAT process of formulating Norms and Standards for Elephant Management. During the year, SANParks worked closely with scientific stakeholders to reach agreement on Thresholds of Potential Concern (TPCs) relating to elephant impacts on biodiversity. Essentially, TPCs are pre-agreed limits which, when exceeded, will result in corrective intervention to prevent unacceptable damage to biodiversity. The scientists are now working on models which will be used to predict TPCs being exceeded, so ensuring timely intervention.

POVERTY ALLEVIATION

SANParks runs several sub-programmes of the Expanded Public Works Programme, focused on the creation of jobs, training opportunities and SMME development in and around the national parks.

For three quarters of the year, these programmes resulted in:

- 3 815 people employed
- 777 093 person working days
- 67 710 training days
- 236 SMMEs created
- 267 SMMEs used
- More than R76 million paid to SMMEs
- More than R73 million paid to BEE contractors for construction work

Total procurement from BBBEE compliant suppliers stands at 53%. SANParks also conducted a self-assessment in line with the Tourism Charter and BEE Scorecard, resulting in a score of above 80% and "Good BEE Contributor" status for the organisation.

STAFF AND SYSTEMS

Happy and healthy staff, working efficiently, is paramount to SANParks' success. Following the development of the Balanced Scorecard System during the last reporting period, the system has been implemented at corporate level. An independent service provider has been appointed to undertake an assessment of the gaps and areas of development required in order to implement the Balanced Scorecard across all levels of the organisation.

The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) also recorded notable achievements during the year, including a road show which visited all parks to inform employees about the EAP. Employees have been advised to refer themselves for assistance, particularly with chronic illnesses, and ongoing psychosocial counselling is provided to employees experiencing difficulties with addiction, disability, relationship conflicts, trauma or any other form of stress.

The HIV and Aids programme conducted an anonymous prevalence survey in all 22 parks, in which two thousand two hundred and ninety-nine (2 299) employees participated. To lead by example, executive members of staff have undergone Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) to kick-start a 'know your status' campaign that will be rolled out to the rest of the staff from February 2007 onwards. Workshops on lifestyle management will be conducted in the new financial year.

Staff was also advised on care, treatment and support options, and negotiations are underway with the 'Right to Care' NGO to secure free treatment for uninsured employees. Fifty (50) managers throughout the Kruger National Park have been trained in the management of HIV and Aids, and ongoing 'train the trainer' sessions will ensure that skills are passed on to more staff members.

2006 also marked the SANParks transition to a new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) partner. This has already resulted in R2 million cost savings, while maintaining very satisfactory service levels.

The SANParks website was also improved via the launch of a web-based visitor feedback mechanism, and the upgrading of the Reservation availability screen to reflect real-time availability.

2007/8 promises to be an excellent year for SANParks. With the planning phase of the massive infrastructure development project completed, and the funds already in place, implementation will begin in earnest. The result will be a network of national parks that will attract even more visitors (local and foreign) and provide them with even better services and an unforgettable travel experience.



Poorer communities are 500 times more likely than wealthy communities to be affected by severe weather events like storms and floods.

FORECASTING FOR RISK REDUCTION

Every economy needs reliable weather forecasting and nowcasting services, to manage risks to key sectors including agriculture, transport, water affairs and, of course, the environment and tourism. Longer-term climate analyses are also necessary, to predict and monitor developments in climate change.

In South Africa, these services are provided by the South African Weather Service (SAWS), a statutory body of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Its mission is to collect process and provide meteorological and climatological information and services for the public good and commercial use of all South Africans and beyond.

In light of the national effort to alleviate poverty, weather services are also an important enabler of economic growth. It is estimated that for every Rand invested in weather services, the economy gains twenty Rand in value. It has also been calculated that poorer communities are five hundred (500) times more susceptible to weather related hazards than wealthier communities.

AVIATION SERVICES

Aviation services are provided to both international and domestic airlines in line with the Conventions of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to promote aviation safety, efficiency and regularity. Due to commitment to service delivery to the aviation community, transparency, consultation with users has been at the top of the agenda. Apart from the quarterly meetings held with representatives of aviation user groups, four (4) regional meetings were also held. These are very interactive and aimed at improving communications with the pilots themselves. These meetings also provide a platform to demonstrate the technological advances being made and new products being made available by SAWS. SAWS also participated at no less than six (6) air shows (including the Africa Aerospace and Defense) and aviation safety seminars.

SAWS' commitment to aviation is also demonstrated by its active involvement in international and regional level. SAWS was represented at the Coordination Meeting between Aviation Information Service/Air Traffic Management/Meteorology Programmes (ICAO) and the Commission for Aeronautical Meteorology (World Meteorological Organization).

RECAPITALISATION PROGRAMME

The infrastructural capital investment plan, to modernise the delivery of meteorological products and services, commenced in earnest during the period under review. The recapitalisation programme, to be rolled out over four years, will upgrade systems to world-leading standards and is the biggest recapitalisation project ever in the South African Weather Service.

The roll-out started during 2005/6 with the establishment of the lightning detection system. During 2006/7, the First Order Stations (professional manned stations gathering weather data) were upgraded to automatic systems. The automated system logs most weather parameters electronically and continuously, augmented by human observation of present weather conditions, cloud type and visibility. The result is better, faster data collection and improved warning and forecasting services.

The hydrogen-generating equipment to fill weather balloons was also upgraded, along with the Global Atmospheric Watch Station in Cape Town. This is one of approximately twenty such stations around the world. The upgrade added aerosol emissions capability, which monitors the long-term trends in trace gases that are indicators of climate change.

During the year, SAWS also managed to secure an extra R180 million funding over three years from Treasury, in order to upgrade the national radar weather network. State of the art S-Band Doppler radars will be installed, bringing our radar network in line with the best in the world. Although the new radar equipment will only be purchased from next year, the funding and preparatory work (such as the appointment of the steering committee) was concluded during 2006/7.

SAWS has been tasked with maintaining the National Climate Database. This entails collecting and updating data from a wide range of stakeholders (such as the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and the Agricultural Research Council) and then collating it in the database along with SAWS' own data. It is also necessary to implement quality control and translate all data into a common format. The enormity of this

task was underestimated, and the database could not be completed during the year. Work will continue in the next reporting period, and the new South African Air Quality Information System (SAAQIS) will also be incorporated into the national database.

The accuracy of SAWS weather forecasting and warning services continues to improve, with nowcasting warnings distributed efficient and quickly to customers via cellular phone technology. One example of commendable early warning was an advisory issued in July, 2006, which warned of very rough seas with waves exceeding 5m, very cold weather, snow, heavy rainfalls and later tornado possibilities over the north eastern parts of the country. Snowfalls occurred over the southern parts as predicted with 20cm snow reported in Tiffendil in August, 2006. Sea waves of 5,7 m were confirmed along the south coast. A tornado was reported on Dullstroom in August, 2006, with several buildings and schools damaged.

UNIFIED MODEL

The accuracy of weather forecasts depend greatly on the effectiveness of the forecasting model applied. During 2006, SAWS implemented the Unified Model, rated as one of the best forecasting models in the world. The Unified Model was developed by the United Kingdom Meteorological Office and works well over Southern Africa.

It was a huge task installing the system, which contains tens of thousands of lines of programming code, scripts and data transfer utilities. The model forms the basis of our national forecasting service, and predicts atmospheric conditions with greater accuracy than most other models.

The Unified Model software is a Numerical Prediction Model, which needs the number-crunching capability of a supercomputer. During the year, SAWS installed a new R5 million supercomputer to handle the task. Equipped with 8 Central Processing Units (CPUs) and 128 Gigabytes of main memory, the supercomputer has processing capacity of 140.8 GFlops. By comparison, a Pentium 4 CPU is only capable of around 10 GFlops processing power.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

An effective weather forecasting service implies more than just gathering data and applying scientific calculations to predict weather conditions. The forecasts must also be available to the people who need them, and presented in a format that highlights the most relevant information for the user. There is also a need to ensure that the user understands the terminology in weather forecast reports.

During the year, SAWS embarked on an outreach pilot programme in conjunction with the SABC, aimed at vulnerable communities in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. The programme aims to find out from communities what type of weather information they find most useful in weather reports, and also to unpack the information and terminology provided in weather forecasts, to ensure that communities get maximum benefit from forecasting services. The programme's major deliverable is SABC regional radio weather broadcasts tailored to the needs and understanding of the audience.

More effective disaster prevention or mitigation was also a main focus, with communities advised on what to do in the event of severe weather like floods or lightning storms. However, the outreach programme also provided the opportunity to introduce broader issues (like climate change and ozone depletion) to these communities. Farmers, in particular, showed great enthusiasm for learning more about the weather.

SAWS also plan annual awareness-raising activities to inform the public (and especially school learners) about weather and climate issues, the role played by SAWS, and the opportunities for a career in weather forecasting. The highlight was the World Meteorological Day event, held in March, 2006 in Nelspruit. Several local schools attended, exposing the learners to the many important activities of SAWS and boosting interest in meteorology.

SKILLS AND TRAINING

There is a national shortage of science skills applicable to meteorology. SAWS had planned to develop a Retention Strategy for Scarce Skills, in order to attract and retain appropriately qualified scientists. This could not be completed on schedule, but has been prioritised for the next reporting period.

However, there were several successful training initiatives undertaken during the year. In October, SAWS hosted a High Profile Training Event in conjunction with the European Meteorological Satellite (EUMETSAT) group, the parent organisation of the second-generation meteorological satellites which South Africa uses. The event employed VisitView technology that allows lecturers in remote locations to present to delegates. Ten countries had training sessions, with each hosting its neighbours. For example, South Africa hosted Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland. Not all countries connected for every lecture. However, the event recorded a peak of eighty-three (83) connections for one lecture.

SAWS also hosted several trainees from Botswana for training in radar, aviation and general forecasting. A third achievement was the hosting of a Severe Weather Forecasting Demonstration Project in July/August, 2006, in conjunction with the World Meteorological Organization and the United Kingdom Meteorological Office. Training was provided on the interpretation of severe weather warnings, in particular those made available from Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP) systems. The goal was to explore and test the usefulness of the products currently available from NWP centres, to improve severe weather forecasting services in countries where sophisticated model outputs are not currently used. Several SADC countries attended, together with the USA, France and the UK.



Whether rain, snow or sunshine, South Africa's weather will be predicted more accurately by the new Unified Model forecasting software.

REORGANISATION OF SERVICES

Weather does not respect provincial boundaries. However, services related to weather, such as disaster management, are handled at provincial and local level. In order to align with these bodies, SAWS reorganised its services along provincial boundaries during the year. This has also served to bring SAWS provincial managers in line with key provincial priorities.

REGIONAL RESTRUCTURING

During the year, the Southern African Development Community replaced its previous meteorological body, the Sub Committee on Meteorology (SCOM) with the Meteorological Association of Southern Africa (MASA). SAWS hosted the meeting of all representatives in March, 2007 to finalise the constitution for the new organisation. MASA will be more focused on meteorological issues and regional co-operation, to promote excellence in weather services throughout the region.

PLANS FOR 2007/8

Apart from the continuation of the recapitalisation programme, SAWS has planned some important initiatives for the next reporting period. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is being negotiated with the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, with regard to the 2010 World Cup. As a southern hemisphere country that uses the same Unified Model as South Africa, Australia's experience in providing weather forecasts for the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games will prove invaluable. There are also plans for SAWS to be represented in the World Cup Organising Committee,

as weather reports will play an important role in a successful tournament. This is particularly important considering that the matches will be played around September, which can be a period of severe weather conditions in South Africa.

2007 is International Polar Year, so there will be many activities around Antarctica. Under the WMO, South Africa must provide forecasts for the second largest area (behind the United States). Our designated area stretches from South Africa down to Antarctica, and approximately half-way to South America in the west and Australia in the east. During the year, there will be special focus on forecasts for the whole Antarctic region, as well as the various SAWS programmes around the Antarctic.

FUNDING MODEL

There is healthy debate, not just in South Africa but globally, about the most suitable funding model applicable to weather agencies that supply both public good and commercial services. In the United States, weather services are entirely funded by government and provided free of charge. Private companies are then urged to add value to free services, for example by packaging forecasts for television channels. In Europe and Japan, approximately 65% of costs are funded by government, with commercial weather services raising the remaining 35% of funds.

Currently, South Africa is aligned more to the Europe/Japan model. However, stakeholders have still to achieve consensus on the most effective funding model for South Africa. It is hoped that the next reporting period will bring greater clarity and consensus on the funding model that will guide South African Weather Service activities in the future.



The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park is the last remaining significant breeding site for leatherback turtles. Visitors are able to experience this as part of a community guiding programme.

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL TREASURE

The Greater St Lucia Wetland Park was the first South African site to be declared as a World Heritage site in 1999. The 300 000 hectare park, stretching for 220km along the KwaZulu-Natal coast, is an area of exceptional cultural and biological diversity. Former President Nelson Mandela described it as "the only place on the globe where the world's oldest mammal (the rhinoceros) and the world's biggest terrestrial mammal (the elephant) share an ecosystem with the

world's oldest fish (the coelacanth) and the world's biggest marine mammal (the whale)".

Following the incorporation of the World Heritage Convention into South African national law in 1999, regulations were passed proclaiming the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park (GSLWP) and a dedicated management authority, the GSLWP Authority (Wetlands Authority), to manage the site under the provisions of the World Heritage Convention Act.

The role of the GSLWP Authority is to:

- Conserve the World Heritage Values of the Park
- Ensure that benefits flow to communities living in and adjacent to the Park
- Optimise tourism development to ensure the achievement of the above goals

During the period under review, the Wetlands Authority undertook a range of successful projects to develop the Park's tourism products, and to benefit both the ecosystems in the Park and the communities living in and around GSLWP.

CULTURE FOR JOBS AND INCOME

Traditionally, many residents in the Park produced grass mats, carvings and other craftworks which were sold at roadside stalls. Evaluation conducted by the Wetlands Authority revealed that the pricing structure for these crafts was not sustainable. The Wetlands Authority enlisted the help of local and international designers to identify more commercially viable and sustainable product lines. This project bore fruit in 2005, when the Wetlands Authority negotiated a contract with Mr Price Home to retail home products crafted by the women in the Park under the 'Rooted' label.

The Wetland Authority has continued to assist the craft SMMEs with product development whilst implementing measures to help the SMMEs to become more independent, self-sufficient and sustainable. This included training and capacity building in product design and business skills. During 2007/8 the Wetlands Authority will further this training and capacity building whilst searching for further markets in order to diversify markets and minimise the risk to crafters.

The Wetlands Authority also runs a parallel Culture group, using the arts (photography, music, oral history, drama) to reconnect the Park's youth with their cultural heritage. Five drama groups have recently been

trained to produce 'intelligent drama', which interprets the cultural landscape and history of the Park, predominantly for the international tourist market. This financial year the groups were assessed and received certificates. They are contracted by the Park to undertake environmental education dramas with contractors working in the Park and local communities.

TOURISM SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The Wetland Authority successfully concluded the second year of a 3 year skills development project funded by the Finnish government. This entailed training 60 local learners, mostly as chefs and guides. Further mentoring of this group occurred and a further 42 people were trained in assistant chef, hospitality and tour guides. All of the learners will receive THETA accredited certificates. Their newfound skills have made the learners more employable and mobile.

PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY

Over the past twelve months, the Wetlands Authority increased its support to a total of 10 group-run vegetable gardens in the Park. Much needed extension advice is also provided to the gardens.

The environmental benefit is that, previously, many of these people were running their own small vegetable gardens in ecologically sensitive areas like wetlands. The newly-established larger gardens have all been placed away from wetlands to ensure more effective conservation.

Further funding has been sourced to role this programme out to scale and to specifically address the issues concerned with swamp forest farming in the Coastal Forest areas. A partnership with Wetlands International will allow innovative solutions to be found to the problem of swamp forests being degraded by unsustainable agricultural practices.

TOURISM ACTIVITY CONCESSIONS

An SMME development programme with 60 SMME learners and 8 SMME businesses is underway. This programme aims to build the capacity of these community based SMMEs and entrepreneurs in order to submit compliant tenders for tourism activity concessions in the Park.

The Wetland Authority has also begun a process of regularising the tourism activity concessions in the Wetland Park.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

The Park is in the process of implementing an infrastructure development programme, to improve the fundamentals, support tourism access and make the Park ready to receive further investment.

Expenditure for the 2006/7 financial year was R11.5m, and the total improvements include the completion of the new Ophansi entrance into Mkhuze Game Reserve, road infrastructure on the Western Shores and Eastern Shores and development of Park furniture to support day visitor activities.

The Ophansi entrance has had a dramatic effect on tourism - tourists can go on a game drive in Mkhuze and an hour later be diving at Sodwana Bay. Also, for the first time tourists are driving through KwaJobe to access Mkhuze which makes any community based tourism development more viable.

All infrastructure development in the Park has targets for labour and SMME procurement, and all targets were met during 2006/7. Job days numbered 57 141 (equivalent to 3.9 Million) and 32 SMMEs were contracted. Ongoing maintenance contracts are also awarded to local SMME companies, to promote job creation in local communities.

RETRACTION OF PINE PLANTATIONS

Alien invasive species are renowned for robbing indigenous plant species of water. In the past, the Park was a major forestry area, with thousands of hectares under pine and gum plantations. A further negative impact is that pine plantations cause the soil to become more alkaline, which promotes bush encroachment in sensitive ecosystems.

The goal is to rehabilitate the Park back to its natural and historical state as a predominantly grasslands area. 2005 saw important progress towards this goal, when the Minister cut down the 6 millionth pine tree in the Park, representing the complete retraction of 8 000ha of pine plantations on the Eastern shores. A further 4 000ha of pine and gum plantations will be removed from the Western shores. The removal of the plantations has allowed the Wetlands Authority to resume natural management by burning, and this will also help to clear bush encroachment and restore the grassland biome.

During 2006/7 100 contracts were issues to 52 SMMEs employing in the region of 1500 community members.

COMMUNITY BASED NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Each May, 5 000 community members gather to harvest ncema, a rush that is used in the construction of huts. As part of its broader Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) programme, the Wetlands Authority has regulated the annual harvest and cutting practices, to balance communities' current needs with the longer-term sustainability of the ncema resource. Harvesters now pay for their ncema, which has attached measurable value to the resource and promoted efforts to conserve it.

SAFCOL LAND INCORPORATION: A HIGHLIGHT

After protracted negotiations with SAFCOL the transfer of the land into Western Shores was concluded in the period under review. This means an additional 8 000 ha of land will fall under conservation.

SLOW RESOLUTION OF LAND CLAIMS: A SETBACK

As a consequence of the forced displacement and relocation of people during the apartheid era, several claims for land in the Wetland Park were lodged with the Commission on Restitution of Land Rights. People were removed from a large proportion of the land under claim due to it being used for commercial timber plantations or for military purposes. Agreements settling the three major claims affecting 60% of the Wetland Park's surface area (the Eastern Shores, Cape Vidal and Sodwana State Forests) were finalised in 2002. There are a further 11 land claims in the Wetland Park that must be settled by the Regional Land Claims Commission before the March 2008 deadline for the finalisation of rural land claims.

The slow progress of the settlement of the land claim on the Wetland Park has created uncertainty and bitterness. Fortunately, an MOA between the Minister of Land Affairs and the Minister of Environment and Tourism has provided a framework for the resolution of land claims in the Park and progress from the RLCC is anticipated in the next financial year.

BREACHING OF THE ST LUCIA MOUTH: A SETBACK

The salinity of water in Lake St Lucia fluctuates due to seasonal inflows of fresh rainwater, which in turn affects the plant, bird and fish life that can be found in and around the Lake. During the past 2-3 years, the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park area has suffered the worst drought in living memory, causing abnormally

low water levels in the Lake. This resulted in the natural closure of the St Lucia mouth.

The Wetland Authority and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife are monitoring the state of the St Lucia Lake since the breaching of the mouth on 2 March 2007. After having been closed for almost five years, the mouth of St Lucia estuary was breached by a combination of high seas (caused by Cyclone Gamede), strong onshore winds and very high tides. The waves washed over the natural beach berm and into the St Lucia estuary - creating gullies. One of these gullies eroded to become the new estuary mouth.

Since the breaching of the mouth the water surface area has increased from an estimated 40% to about 75% of the St Lucia Lake basin, and about 45% volume. Zululand continues to be in the grips of a severe drought currently in its 6th year and little freshwater is entering the system, and the freshwater pans adjacent to the lake are virtually all dry. Bouts of rain which fell recently have maintained a trickle of water from the uMkhuzi river flowing into the lake and provided some relief on the Eastern and Western Shores. However the lake levels have already begun to drop due to evaporation, increasing salinity levels. The ecological results associated with the mouth breaching will become increasingly evident if the drought persists and management will continue to monitor this carefully going forward.

HIGHLIGHTED PLANS FOR THE 2007/8

1. Changing the name of the Park and the roll out of a branding and marketing strategy
2. Fencing of Ozabeni section of the Park which will complete the consolidation of the Park into one open ecological area including 6 major ecosystems.
3. Implementation of the People and Parks programme, including the settlement of the land claims in the Park by the RLCC and the implementation of the settlement agreements and beneficiation programme.