

Environment Quarterly

Ezemvelo Ngekota ● Tikologo ka Kotara ● Mbango wa Kotara na Kotara

**THE GOLDEN
GATE LIFELINE:**
Rehabilitating South Africa's
Highland Wetland for Water Security

THE GREEN ENGINE:
Why Forests and Fisheries are
the Backbone of our Economy

KRUGER AT A CROSSROADS:
Inside the R500-Million Mission
to Rebuild our National Icon



ENVIRONMENTAL CALENDAR 2026

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

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ENVIRONMENTAL CALENDAR

- 2 February World Wetlands Day
- 3 March World Wildlife Day
- 21 March International Day of Forests
- 23 March World Meteorological Day
- 22 April Earth Day
- 12 May World Migratory Bird Day
- 22 May International Day for Biological Diversity
- 5 June World Environment Day
- 8 June World Oceans Day

- 17 June World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
- 31 July World Ranger Day
- 16 September International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer
- 10 September World Cleanup Day
- 22 September World Rhino Day
- 1-30 September National Arbor Month
- 1-31 October National Transport Month
- 21 November World Fisheries Day

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- 1 January (Thu) New Year's Day
- 21 March (Sat) Human Rights Day
- 3 April (Fri) Good Friday
- 6 April (Mon) Family Day
- 27 April (Mon) Freedom Day
- 1 May (Fri) Workers' Day
- 16 June (Tue) Youth Day
- 9 August (Sun) National Women's Day
- 10 August (Mon) Public holiday (Women's Day observed)
- 24 September (Thu) Heritage Day
- 16 December (Wed) Day of Reconciliation
- 25 December (Fri) Christmas Day
- 26 December (Sat) Day of Goodwill

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About the back cover image:

The Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve

The Colbyn Wetland Nature Reserve (previously Colbyn Valley Nature Area) was declared as a protected area on 25 June 2014. It is 60 hectares in extent and consists of wetland, peatland, grassland, and adjoining quartzite ridges. It is part of a "green corridor", together with adjoining areas such as Meintjieskop, the Pretoria National Botanical Garden, the University of Pretoria's LC de Villiers sports campus, and the experimental farm. The Hartbeesspruit flows through the reserve and is later joined by the Moreletaspruit before draining into Roodeplaats Dam.



To use this QR code conveniently you must have a smartphone equipped with a camera and a QR code reader/camera application feature.





Dear Valued Stakeholder,

As we launch this edition of EQ, South Africa finds itself at a unique crossroads of challenge and immense opportunity. From the salt-sprayed docks of Saldanha Bay to the ancient, rain-soaked canopy of the Kruger National Park, the stories in this issue reflect a nation that is not merely weathering the storm but actively redesigning its future.

The theme of this season has undeniably been resilience. The devastating floods that struck our

“crown jewel,” the Kruger National Park, earlier this year served as a stark reminder of our vulnerability to a changing climate. With damage estimates reaching R500 million, the task of recovery is monumental. Yet, as we explore in our feature, this crisis has birthed a remarkable “united front.” Through the establishment of the Kruger Recovery Fund and the tireless spirit of the Honorary Rangers, we are seeing a shift from disaster management to climate-resilient innovation. We aren’t just rebuilding bridges; we are engineering a heritage that can withstand the tests of tomorrow.

Our commitment to inclusivity has also reached a historic milestone. The unveiling of the first Braille interpretive signage at Blaauwberg Nature Reserve marks a shift in how we define “access.” Nature is a national asset, and by moving toward a “touch, listen, and feel” philosophy, we ensure that the beauty of our coastline truly belongs to every South African, regardless of physical ability.

In the global arena, our focus on the “Green Engine” of our economy has never been sharper. Whether through the International Day of Forests or our strengthened fisheries

ties with the European Union, we are proving that environmental protection and economic prosperity are two sides of the same coin. By prioritising the livelihoods of our small-scale fishers and investing in the “living pharmacies” of our medicinal plants, we are protecting the heritage that sustains our health and our homes.

As we look toward the centenary of the Kruger National Park this May, let us reflect on the “shongololo” metaphor shared by Minister Willie Aucamp. Change and recovery may take time to “put on their boots,” but once the momentum begins, the progress is unstoppable.

This issue of EQ is a tribute to that momentum. It is a celebration of the scientists, the community leaders, the volunteers, and the citizens who understand that looking after our wildlife and wild spaces is a collective national commitment. Together, we are steering South Africa from a season of crisis toward a future of enduring renewal.

Stay green, stay informed

Erica

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Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods



WORLD
WILDLIFE DAY
3 MARCH 2026



forestry, fisheries
& the environment
Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
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Conserving Health and Heritage: World Wildlife Day 2026 Shines a Light on Medicinal Plants

Images by EWT Pepper-bark Project

Every year on 3 March, the world celebrates World Wildlife Day. While we often think of “wildlife” as the Big Five, the 2026 theme—“**Medicinal and Aromatic Plants: Conserving Health, Heritage and Livelihoods**”—reminds us that the plants beneath our feet are just as vital. Established by the UN to honour the signing of CITES, this day now highlights the plants that sustain human health and local economies.



Protected tree: *Warburgia salutaris* (pepper-bark tree, Afrikaans: Peperbasboom, Sotho: Molaka, Venda: Mulanga, Zulu: Isibaha) is a species of tree in the family Canellaceae.



A Heritage Under Pressure

In South Africa, where an estimated 80% of the population uses traditional medicine, medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) are the backbone of primary healthcare. However, these “living pharmacies” are under immense pressure. Habitat loss, climate change, and the growing demand in “muthi” markets have led to the overharvesting of many wild species.

Species Spotlight: The Pepper Bark Tree (*Warburgia salutaris*)

A significant example of both the challenge and the hope in South African botany is the **Pepper Bark Tree**. Known for its pungent, peppery-tasting bark, it is a powerhouse of traditional medicine, used to treat everything from respiratory infections to digestive issues.

Because of its high value, the species was pushed to the brink of extinction by bark-stripping. However, through a collaborative effort between the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), SANParks, and traditional healers, thousands of cultivated saplings have been distributed to communities. This initiative allows people to grow their own “pharmacy” at home, reducing the pressure on wild populations in areas like the Kruger National Park.

The Kruger Recovery and Wildlife Protection

This conservation work happens against a backdrop of environmental challenges. Following the devastating **R500 million** in damage caused by the recent Kruger floods. Our focus is on both infrastructure and ecosystem resilience. As Minister Willie Aucamp noted:

“The Kruger National Park is not just a conservation landscape—it is an economic lifeline for the region and a symbol of our national heritage. We must treat this recovery as business unusual.”

How We Can Look After Our Wildlife

To better protect our flora and fauna, we can:

- **Support Sustainable Sourcing:** Only buy herbal products from reputable, sustainable suppliers.
- **Plant Indigenous:** Grow medicinal plants like *Tulbaghia violacea* (Wild Garlic) or *Artemisia afra* (African Wormwood) in your own garden.
- **Report Illegal Harvesting:** Help the DFFE by reporting the poaching of rare plants like cycads or the Pepper Bark Tree.

Did You Know?

Our daily lives are intricately linked to the health of the natural world. These facts highlight the scale of our reliance on wild species and the urgent need for sustainable management:

- **A Global Life Support System:** Over 50,000 wild species are used daily to meet the food, fuel, and medicinal needs of billions of people across the globe.
- **Healing at Risk:** Approximately 9% of the plant species used worldwide for medicinal and aromatic purposes are currently threatened with extinction. The primary drivers are overharvesting, habitat loss, climate change, and illegal trade.
- **Feeding the World:** One in five people rely directly on wild plants, algae, and fungi for both their food security and their primary source of income.
- **The Backbone of Healthcare:** In developing countries, between 70% and 95% of the population rely on traditional medicine for their primary healthcare, demonstrating the deep cultural and medical value of our biodiversity.

Expand Your Expertise

If you are passionate about the environment and wish to deepen your understanding of biodiversity, you can access world-class education through Learning for Nature. This is a premier e-learning platform that connects biodiversity enthusiasts with internationally recognised experts and institutions.

- **Self-Paced Learning:** Most courses are designed to be flexible, allowing you to learn at your own speed to fit your professional or personal schedule.
- **Certificates of Completion:** Many modules offer certificates to bolster your professional portfolio.
- **Open and Free Access:** A wide variety of courses are available for free to the public, ensuring that knowledge on environmental governance and conservation is accessible to all.

Start your journey today:

- **Explore All Courses:** Learning for Nature - Course Portal
- **Featured Open Courses:** Join ongoing discussions on ecosystem restoration, sustainable development goals, and biodiversity policy.

The Guardian of the Cape

Focus on our national flower: King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*)

- **Significance:** Beyond its aesthetic beauty, the Protea represents the Cape Floral Kingdom — the smallest but richest of the world’s six floral kingdoms. It symbolises the resilience of our landscape, as these plants have adapted to survive and thrive in fire-prone ecosystems.
- **Environmental Effort:** The DFFE, through its Working on Fire programmes, plays a critical role in protecting the Protea’s habitat. By removing invasive alien plants that outcompete indigenous flora and managing controlled burns, these initiatives ensure that our national heritage continues to flourish for future generations.



SA's Wetlands: Protectors of Biodiversity

By Zibuse Ndlovu
Image by GroundUp



The stunning beauty and richness of South Africa's landscapes, especially its wetlands, often go unnoticed. These vital ecosystems act like nature's sponges, filtering water, storing carbon, and supporting a wide variety of life, making them essential for a healthy environment. Yet, as the world grapples with climate change and urban growth, the need to safeguard these areas has never been more urgent.

"The newly released National Wetland Management Framework, published in 2021, aims to bring together various sectors to protect and restore these ecosystems, ensuring they continue to provide essential services for both nature and our communities," says Mr Stanley Tshitwamulomoni, Director of Water Sources and Wetlands Conservation at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE).

According to Mr Tshitwamulomoni, this ambitious plan is a joint effort involving the DFFE, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), and the Department of Agriculture. "It outlines 18 strategic goals focused on governance, sustainable use, and restoration. It also recognises wetlands as high-value ecosystems that are vital for the well-being of all South Africans. Additionally, it works alongside the Working for Wetlands Programme, which started in 2000 and has successfully restored damaged wetlands while creating jobs and promoting environmental care in rural communities," he explains.

Laws like the National Water Act and the National Environmental Management Act highlight the importance of wetlands, regulating land use and pollution to protect these critical areas. The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act further enhances protection by designating nature reserves and parks that include wetlands, ensuring these ecosystems are preserved for future generations. "South Africa commits to international standards through the Ramsar Convention, which requires the designation of wetlands of international importance. Currently, 32 sites in South Africa are recognised as Ramsar Sites, showcasing the country's dedication to wetland conservation," says Mr Tshitwamulomoni.

In addition to legal protection, community involvement is crucial in these efforts. Local partnerships promote sustainable farming practices and citizen science initiatives, empowering communities to monitor wetlands and participate in conservation activities. Healthy wetlands offer more than just ecological benefits; they provide food, water, and cultural resources, enriching the lives of those who rely on them.

"People need wetlands, but wetlands also need people - to protect them, to restore them and to teach future generations about them," says Ms Jackie Jay, DFFE's Conservation Biodiversity Officer, Directorate Water Sources and Wetlands Conservation.



Above: Picture showing the quality of water before it enters a wetland (Nylsvley Ramsar Site).



Above: Picture showing quality of water halfway through the wetland. (Nylsvley Ramsar Site).

However, despite these efforts, wetlands face growing threats. Urban expansion, agricultural drainage, invasive species, and pollution are latest significant pressures worsened by climate change. The National Biodiversity Assessment released in 2025, shows that estuaries, rivers, and wetlands are among the most threatened ecosystems in South Africa. The degradation of these areas could lead to dire consequences, including loss of biodiversity, poorer water quality, and increased vulnerability to floods and droughts.

Moreover, the role of wetlands in combating climate change is vital. By acting as natural carbon sinks, they capture and store large amounts of carbon, helping to lower greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere. Peatlands, in particular, are remarkable carbon reservoirs, holding more carbon than all the world's forests combined. The Mfabeni Mire in KwaZulu-Natal is a prime example, highlighting the importance of preserving these ancient ecosystems.

As South Africa moves forward, public education campaigns, eco-tourism initiatives, and community engagement will be essential in fostering a culture of wetland conservation. By raising awareness of the ecological and socio-economic benefits of wetlands, communities can be empowered to protect these vital ecosystems.

In a world increasingly threatened by climate change, preserving South Africa's wetlands is not just an environmental necessity; it is a crucial step towards safeguarding the livelihoods and well-being of countless communities. As we unite to protect these natural treasures, our wetlands stand as resilient guardians, holding the promise of a sustainable future for all.



Above: Community member harvesting reeds for basket making. Healthy wetlands offer more than just ecological benefits; they provide food, water, and cultural resources, enriching the lives of those who rely on them.



About the contributor: Zibuse Ndlovu

Zibuse Ndlovu is the Assistant Director in the Communications and Advocacy Chief Directorate at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

The Golden Gate Lifeline:

Rehabilitating South Africa's Highland Wetland for Water Security

Photos by SANParks



Above: Sediment trapping intervention



Above: Concrete buttress weir.

In the rugged highlands of South Africa's south-eastern Free State, where icy winter snows dust the sandstone cliffs and summer thunderstorms swell the rivers, a vital, yet often overlooked, environmental restoration is underway. The Golden Gate Wetland Rehabilitation Project is working to heal the ancient wetland systems within the Golden Gate Highlands National Park (GGHNP).

While the park is celebrated for its dramatic scenery, the true value of this project lies beneath the surface, in the spongy, water-logged soils that are critical to the region's and the nation's water supply.

Situated near the towns of Clarens and Phuthaditjhaba, the project targets the wetlands located in the quaternary catchments C81F and C81G (figure 1). These are not just any wet patches in the landscape; they are the headwaters of the Klerkspruit River, a major perennial system that feeds into the larger Elands and Wilge River catchments. This places the Golden Gate wetlands at the very source of a water lifeline that extends hundreds of kilometres northwards, ultimately contributing to the reservoirs that supply South Africa's economic heartland, Gauteng. This crucial connection designates the area as one of the most important Water Catchment Areas (WCA) in the country.

The Sponges of the Highlands

The wetlands within C81F and C81G act as natural sponges and kidneys for the landscape. Their primary functions are to attenuate floods, slowing down stormwater runoff, control erosion, and trap sediment. By performing these roles, they protect downstream watercourses, infrastructure, and developments from the damaging effects of fast flowing, silt laden water. Healthy wetlands mean cleaner, more reliable water flowing into the Elands River, then the Wilge, and eventually to the Vaal Dam. The rehabilitation of these systems is therefore not just a local conservation exercise; it is a direct investment in improving water quality for millions of people downstream.

The GGHNP, encompassing over 34,000 hectares with altitudes ranging from 1,978 to 2,167 metres above sea level, provides a protected haven for these ecosystems. The park experiences a climate of extremes, with summer temperatures soaring to 38°C and winter lows plummeting to -11°C. Average annual rainfall is around 680 mm but can more than double on the higher southern ground, feeding the wetlands that are nestled within the Grassland Biome. Here, vegetation types like Basotho Montane Shrubland and Northern Drakensberg Highland Grassland dominate, adapted to a regime of frequent fires and occasional snow.



Above: A rehabilitation structure consisting of the multiple types of interventions in one such as a: Brick weir, Concrete road crossing, Concrete strips and Stone masonry.



Above: Locality of the Golden Gate Highlands National Park Wetland Rehabilitation situated near the towns of Clarens and Phuthaditjhaba

Threats in a Protected Landscape

Thanks to its national park status, the Golden Gate wetlands are relatively untransformed and in a far better condition than many outside its boundaries. However, they are not immune to degradation. A comprehensive assessment (GroundTruth, 2017) identified several key threats that are slowly eroding the integrity of these high-altitude sponges:

Erosion from Land Use: Historical and current grazing pressures from wildlife and, in some areas, cattle have led to overgrazing. This removes the vegetation that binds the soil, making the wetlands vulnerable to head-cut erosion and donga (gully) formation, which rapidly drains the system.

Infrastructure Impacts: Both formal and informal roads that traverse the wetlands act as artificial drainage channels, concentrating flow and initiating erosion. The legacy of historical cultivation is also evident in the form of old dam walls and artificial drainage furrows, which disrupt the natural hydrology.

Alien Invasive Plants: A subtle but steady spread of alien invasive species is beginning to outcompete native vegetation, altering the ecosystem's structure and function.

Healing the Headwaters

The Golden Gate Wetland Rehabilitation Project is a direct response to these threats. Its objectives are multifaceted, aiming to restore the natural processes that have been disrupted. The rehabilitation work involves stabilising erosion gullies to prevent further incision and sediment loss, removing alien plant

species to allow indigenous flora to recover, and, where possible, dismantling artificial structures to restore the natural sheet flow of water across the wetland surface.

By halting erosion, the project ensures that sediment is trapped in the highlands rather than silting up downstream dams. By controlling alien plants, it conserves the unique biodiversity of the park. And by restoring the natural hydrology, it enhances the wetland's capacity to slowly release clean, cool water into the Klerkspruit River system (figures 2-4).

The significance of this project extends far beyond the park borders. In a water scarce country like South Africa, every drop counts. By protecting and rehabilitating the wetlands in the Golden Gate Highlands National Park, conservationists are not only preserving a pristine piece of the country's natural heritage but are actively securing a cleaner, more sustainable water future for the Gauteng region and beyond. The project is a powerful reminder that the health of our downstream economies is inextricably linked to the health of our upstream mountain wetlands.

DID YOU KNOW?

A major significant part of the project is that it is also a public works programme specifically aimed to provide job opportunities for the under privileged people. Under the programme, at least 60% of the workers have to be women, 20% youth and 2% should be people with disabilities



Green Initiatives Kick Off 2026 School Year

By Letti Mosemi and Tshagofatso Ndhlovu

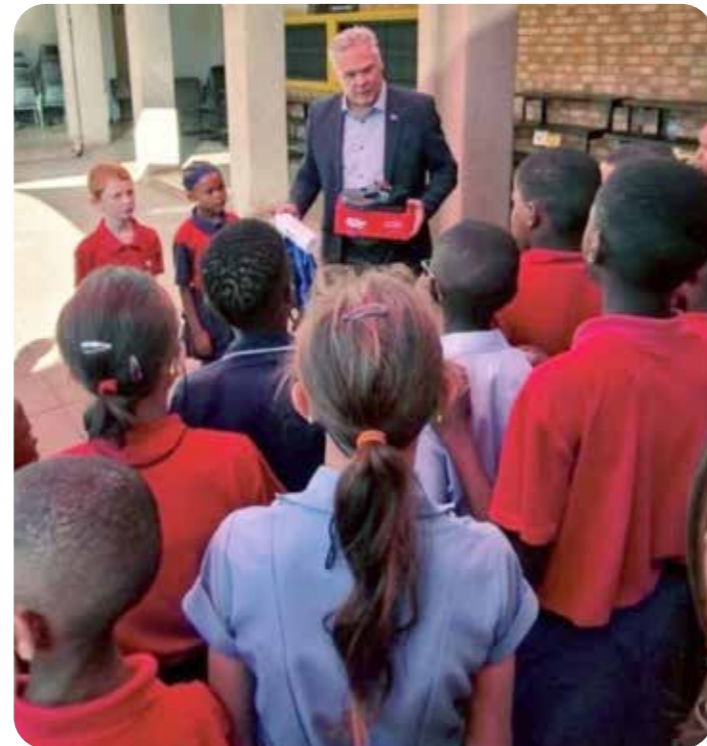


Above: Addressing learners at Kliptown Secondary School in Soweto with warmth and purpose on 15 January 2026, Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts emphasised that environmental awareness is not only the government's responsibility but a shared duty that begins at a young age.



Above: A key highlight of the campaign was tree planting which symbolised growth, sustainability, and hope. Learners actively participated in the planting of trees on school grounds, gaining firsthand experience in environmental conservation. This practical engagement helped instil a sense of ownership and pride, teaching learners that even small actions can contribute meaningfully to combating climate change and environmental degradation.

A new school year brings with it hope for a greener future, personal growth, and the opportunity to shape a bright future for learners across South Africa. This green spirit was powerfully echoed during the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment's (DFFE) "Green Back to School" awareness campaign, led by Minister Willie Aucamp alongside Deputy Ministers Bernice Swarts and Narend Singh.



Above: Kathu Primary School in the Northern Cape buzzed with excitement on 20 January 2026 as Minister Willie Aucamp encouraged learners to explore ways of playing active roles in caring for our planet.

One of the DFFE's core mandates is to ensure that environmental resources are preserved for present and future generations. This mission is championed through the department's annual campaign, which sees leadership visiting schools nationwide to encourage a commitment to learning and to foster environmental awareness. The campaign goes beyond educational support, as the department also donates much-needed supplies, including school uniforms, furniture, and sanitary packages.



About the contributor: Letti Mosemi

Ms Letti Mosemi is an intern in the Chief Directorate, Communications and Advocacy. She holds a Diploma in Marketing from the Tshwane University of Technology



TIPS

TO BECOMING A GREEN CHAMPION IN YOUR SCHOOL!



Choose Reusables: Using reusable water bottles, lunchboxes, and cutlery instead of single-use products has a positive impact on our environment.



Join or Start a Club: Join your school's Green Club—and if one doesn't exist, start one! This ensures active participation in caring for the environment.



Travel Green: Walking or cycling to school helps reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into our air. If your school is further away, consider joining a lift club!



Start a Compost Garden: Organise your friends and create a compost garden at your school. This provides significant environmental, educational, and economic benefits by turning cafeteria food waste into nutrient-rich soil.



Save Water and Energy: Wait for the end of the week to wash your school uniform so you have a full load of laundry. Also, consider washing your clothes in cold water to save both water and electricity.



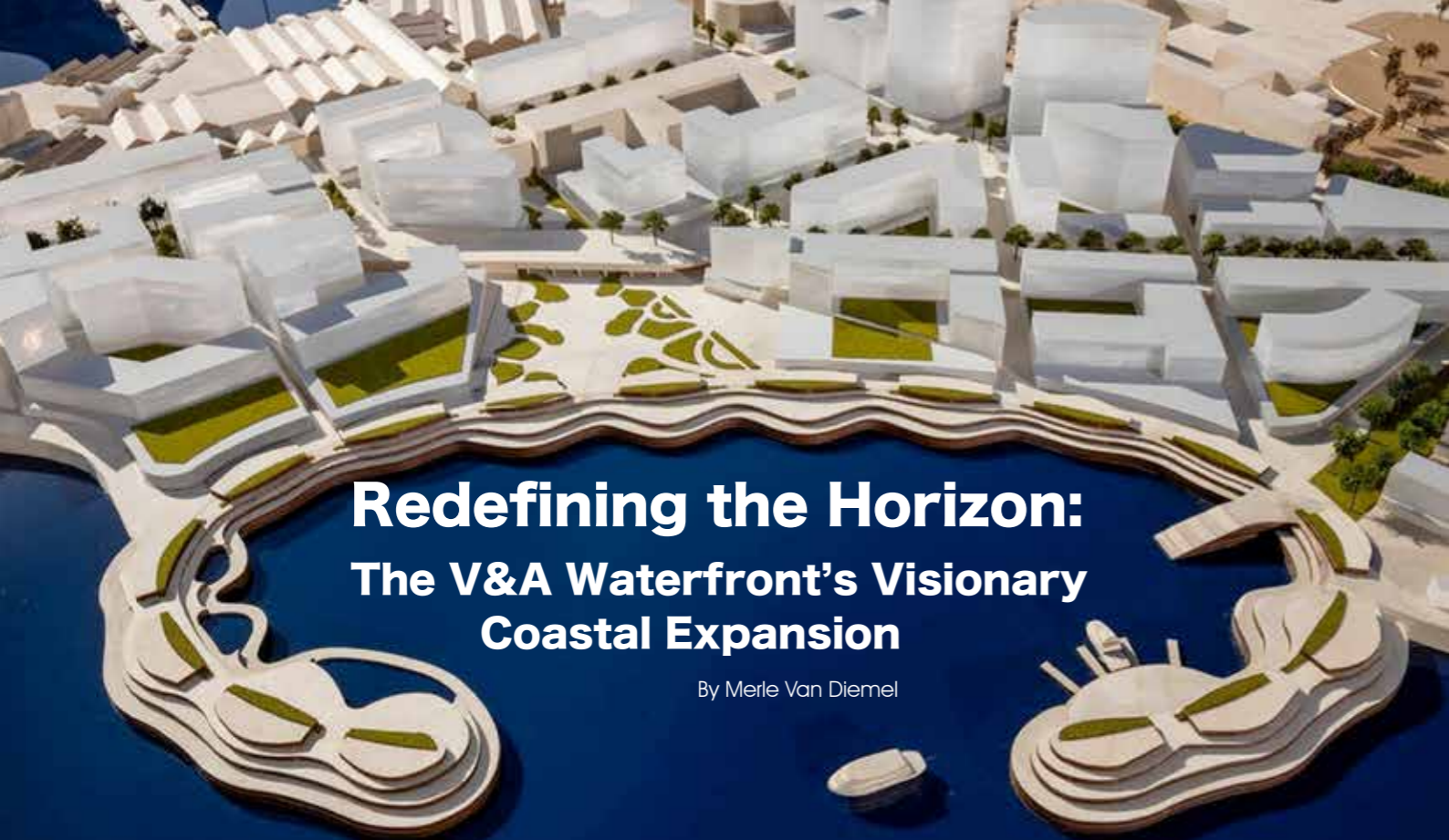
Above: Going beyond environmental awareness, Deputy Minister Narend Singh demonstrated government's commitment to learner well-being and dignity through the donation of school uniform sanitary packages at multiple schools in KwaZulu-Natal on 5 February 2026. These contributions addressed the real challenges that many learners are faced with and aimed to ensure that no child is left behind due to the lack of basic necessities.



Above: The donation of school desks ensured that the schools are equipped with the necessary equipment needed for the school year.



Above: Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts's visit to Tshwane University of Technology highlighted the various opportunities available within the green sector.



Redefining the Horizon: The V&A Waterfront's Visionary Coastal Expansion

By Merle Van Diemel

Cape Town's iconic V&A Waterfront may soon be expanding its footprint—not just on land, but into the ocean itself. Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp, has officially invited the public to comment on a landmark pre-approval application for land reclamation in the Granger Bay area.

This development represents a sophisticated leap in urban planning for South Africa. While the term "land reclamation" sounds technical, it is essentially the process of artificially creating new land where there was once only water. For many, this evokes images of the world-renowned "Palm Islands" in Dubai. While the V&A's 3.81-hectare proposal is more boutique in scale, the ambition remains the same: to create a world-class, multi-functional peninsula that blends modern infrastructure with the natural beauty of the Atlantic.

What Does the Development Entail?

The proposed project is strategically divided to ensure that the new land serves both the economy and the public:

- Coastal Protection (0.80 ha): Essential breakwaters and revetments to shield the coast from the power of the ocean.
- Public Amenities and Open Spaces (1.47 ha): Dedicated areas for South Africans and tourists to enjoy the coastline, ensuring the sea-land property remains accessible to everyone.
- Mixed-Use Development (1.54 ha): High-end spaces for retail, residential, or commercial use, adding to the vibrancy of the Granger Bay Point Precinct.

A Rigorous Process for a Sustainable Future
Developing in coastal waters is a complex legal and environmental journey. The process involves a "two-part" approval system:

1. **Ministerial Pre-approval:** Minister Aucamp must first grant in-principle approval after consulting the public.
2. **Parliamentary Ratification:** If the Minister approves, the decision must be ratified by Parliament. Without this "nod" from our elected officials, the project cannot proceed.

Furthermore, this doesn't replace the need for a strict **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)**. Even if Parliament says yes, the V&A Waterfront must still prove that the project will not cause undue harm to our marine ecosystems. This "double-lock" system ensures that while we aim for the heights of international hubs like Dubai, we do so with a uniquely South African commitment to environmental justice.

Your Voice Matters

Minister Aucamp has emphasised that transparency is key to this development. The public has been invited to submit written representations on this pre-approval application. The window for comments remains open for 30 days following the official publication of the Gazette notice.

As we look toward the potential of new coastal vistas and enhanced public spaces, this project stands as a testament to South Africa's evolving relationship with the sea—building a future that is as sustainable as it is spectacular.

Uniting for Environmental Justice

By Merle Van Diemel



ABOVE: Prosecutors from the National Prosecuting Authority attended the workshop to align efforts on building successful environmental cases.

The West Coast recently provided the setting for a significant alliance aimed at enhancing environmental protection. From 12 to 13 February 2026, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) hosted a two-day workshop in Saldanha Bay, bringing together the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and several key partners.

Representatives from CapeNature, the South African Police Service (SAPS), and various departments—including Department of Water and Sanitation, Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEADP)—convened with a clear mission: to strengthen the protection of our natural environment through improved collaboration.

The workshop, facilitated by DFFE's Mr Mzondeleli Dlulane, Director of Enforcement: Oceans and Coast, commenced with a sobering reminder from Mr. Ayub Mohamed of the Western Cape Government. He stressed the vital role of the NPA as a strategic partner, warning that if the prosecution process is not effectively managed, environmental crime will persist.

The challenges are real for those on the front lines. Mr Cheslyn Liebenberg, DFFE Chief Director of Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance, emphasised that the success of a case begins long before it reaches the courtroom. He pointed out that investigators are the first point of contact, and bear the responsibility of ensuring that every statement, piece of evidence, and detail is accurately documented in the docket.



ABOVE: Delegates received their certificates during the graduation ceremony.

Over the two days, delegates explored the practical aspects of environmental protection:

- Day One focused on the legal framework, covering everything from coastal management, marine, protected areas, and forest fire regulations. The NPA also shared critical insights on how to build cases that actually stick in court.
- Day Two delved into the fundamentals of enforcement, tackling pressing issues like illegal fishing, mining compliance, and biodiversity protection. SAPS and the NPA in the Western Cape helped bridge the gap between making arrests and making a legal decision to prosecute.

The session concluded with a graduation ceremony, celebrating a group of delegates who now share a "common language" in their efforts. They departed Saldanha Bay not merely as officials from various departments, but as a united front committed to the pursuit of environmental justice.



ABOVE: Mr Cheslyn Liebenberg (DFFE), thanked delegates at the close of the successful NPA training workshop in Saldanha Bay.



About the contributor: Merle Van Diemel

Merle Van Diemel is a Senior Communication Officer: Media Relations and Internal Communications in the Directorate: Communication Services in Cape Town. She holds a master's degree in Public Relations Management from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.



Forests and economies



Why Forests are the Backbone of the Global Economy

Since its proclamation by the UN General Assembly in 2012, the International Day of Forests on 21 March has served as a global call to action. In 2026, the theme “Forests and Economies” highlights a truth that grandmothers like Gogo have known for generations: healthy forests are the foundation of prosperous nations.

Powering the World’s Pocketbook

We often underestimate the sheer economic scale of our woodlands. Did you know that an estimated USD 44 trillion—more than half of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—depends directly on nature, including our forests? They are not just scenic landscapes; they are industrial powerhouses.

- **Sustainable Replacements:** As South Africa moves toward a “bioeconomy,” wood and bamboo are emerging as renewable

replacements for carbon-intensive materials like steel, concrete, and plastics.

- **The Non-Wood Harvest:** Up to 5.8 billion people worldwide use non-wood products—such as resins, foods, and medicinal plants—to support their livelihoods. This “hidden economy” is worth over USD 9 billion annually.
- **Energy Security:** For more than 2 billion people, woodfuel and charcoal provide the essential energy needed for cooking and heating, supporting hundreds of millions of jobs in the process.

The Cost of Loss

Investing in forest restoration isn’t just a “kind” thing to do; it is a financial necessity. Forest loss is incredibly expensive, leading to soil erosion, devastating floods, and productivity losses that far outweigh any short-term gains from deforestation. By storing carbon and moderating temperatures, forests protect our national economy from climate-related disasters that can cost billions of rands in damages.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS 2026



Minister Launches R500M Recovery for Kruger Floods

By Somila Wayisa
(Additional reporting: Daily Maverick)



ABOVE: Prosecutors from the National Prosecuting Authority attended the workshop to align efforts on building successful environmental cases.

The Minister for Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp has announced a R500 million recovery plan for Kruger National Park, which was recently ravaged by severe flooding. Speaking during the media briefing held on 22 January 2026, in Cape Town, Minister Aucamp said he was greatly affected by the extent of the flood's impact on Kruger National Park.

"As you are aware that I recently visited the flood-stricken Kruger National Park, I am still affected by the extent of the impact and devastation to our cherished national asset," the Minister said.

The flooding extended beyond the Park into parts of Limpopo and Mpumalanga, prompting the declaration of a National Disaster under Section 23 of the Disaster Management Act — a decision the Minister described as "unequivocally the right one."

The Extent of the Damage

The Park experienced widespread destruction to bridges, roads, water infrastructure, electrical systems, staff villages, and tourist accommodation facilities. Fifteen camps were closed at the time of

the briefing, some completely inaccessible due to washed-away roads and bridges.

"In the Kruger National Park alone, the damage to critical infrastructure is so widespread that SANParks is estimating that the damage possibly runs into hundreds of millions," Minister Aucamp confirmed. While initial estimates started lower, updated assessments now place the total damage at approximately R500 million, with further projections suggesting the figure could reach R650 million once final evaluations are concluded in mid-March.

Tourism operations — a critical revenue source for SANParks — were significantly disrupted. Between 9 and 19 January 2026, the Park recorded 24,073 guest entries, representing a 41% decline compared to the same period in the previous year. With SANParks generating close to 80% of its operating budget independently, the revenue loss poses risks to the sustainability of the broader parks network.

Despite the devastation, the Minister highlighted one critical success: "The most important highlight is that no lives were lost," he said, crediting early warning systems and coordinated evacuations.

Ecological Resilience Amid Infrastructure Strain

The Chief Executive Officer of South African National Parks (SANParks), Ms Hapiloe Sello, addressed the media on the broader ecological and operational state of the Park. Ms Sello explained that while infrastructure damage required urgent intervention, the Park's ecosystems had shown notable resilience. Seasonal flooding, she indicated, forms part of the natural ecological cycle within riverine systems, contributing to nutrient redistribution, soil regeneration and habitat renewal.

"From an ecological perspective, flooding can be restorative," she stated. "Our focus is therefore twofold — repairing and strengthening infrastructure while allowing natural systems the space to recover as they have done for centuries."

She added that technical teams had been deployed across affected zones to conduct structural assessments, evaluate safety risks and prioritise repairs. Environmental monitoring teams were simultaneously tracking river health, sediment movement and vegetation recovery.

The Kruger Recovery Fund



ABOVE: In January 2026, severe flooding caused extensive damage across Kruger National Park, one of South Africa's most important conservation areas and a cornerstone of the country's tourism economy.

Recognising the magnitude of the rebuilding effort required, the Minister formally announced the establishment of the Kruger Recovery Fund under SANParks. "The Kruger National Park cannot rebuild without help. A well-coordinated, rapid response — founded on our collective responsibility and appreciation for our national asset — is imperative," he stated.

The Fund aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Park as a national heritage asset and economic driver, while strengthening climate resilience. Minister Aucamp told Daily Maverick that he has "insisted on three independent auditing firms" to provide proper oversight, ensuring every cent goes toward recovery.

Minister Aucamp cautioned that only two authorised funds are legitimate: the SANParks Kruger Recovery Fund and the Honorary Rangers' Kruger Flood 2026 Fund.

Honorary Rangers: Mobilising Community Support
A notable highlight of the recovery initiative was the immediate support from the SANParks Honorary Rangers — a trusted volunteer partner with a long-standing record of conservation fundraising.

"One of those organisations at the forefront of that support is the Honorary Rangers, a long-term strategic and trusted partner of SANParks, who will assist with funding conducted through their normal fundraising channels under the funding campaign, 'the Kruger Flood 2026 Fund'," the Minister announced. Their involvement reinforces the strength of collaborative partnerships between government, civil society and conservation stakeholders in times of crisis.

A Centenary Year of Reflection and Resolve

The floods occurred during the Park's centenary year, adding symbolic weight to the recovery efforts. The Minister emphasised the importance of safeguarding the Park for future generations: "As Kruger National Park celebrates its centenary this year, it is important to work to ensure that many generations after us will have the same pleasure and privilege" of experiencing its iconic wildlife and landscapes.

Looking Forward

The road to recovery remains extensive, involving infrastructure reconstruction, ecological assessments and phased reopening plans. However, the briefing made one message clear: the rebuilding of the Kruger National Park is not solely a government responsibility — it is a collective national commitment.

Through transparent governance, strategic partnerships and public support — particularly from the Honorary Rangers — South Africa's most iconic conservation landscape is steadily moving from crisis toward renewal.



About the contributor: Somila Wayisa

Somila Wayisa is an Intern within the Communication Services Directorate in the Cape Town office of Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

North West Oversight Visit Strengthens Environmental Impact

By Tshегоfatso Ndhlovu



DAY 1: Accompanied by the Deputy Director-General for Environmental Programmes, Dr Nonhlanhla Mkhize and Deputy Director-General for Chemicals and Waste management, Ms Mamogala Musekene, Deputy Minister Swarts kicked things off on 7 January 2026 where she visited the DFFE offices in Brits North West.

Day 1

Oversight visits form a critical function of effective governance as they allow departmental leadership and senior officials to move beyond daily reports and presentations, and instead assess first-hand how government policies, programmes and public funds are translating into real impact on the ground. One such a visit was Deputy Minister Swarts' visit to the North West province in January of 2026.

The three-day monitoring and evaluation visit took place from 7 to 9 January 2026 and saw the Deputy Minister visit several projects funded by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) in the North West. The visit formed part of the DFFE's ongoing oversight programme aimed at assessing implementation progress, strengthening stakeholder partnerships and ensuring that projects deliver meaningful environmental and socio-economic benefits to communities all over South Africa.

During the visit she gained first-hand insight into the work being carried out. Officials presented updates on various ongoing projects, outlining both the progress achieved and the challenges faced.

“Oversight visits form a critical function of effective governance as they allow departmental leadership and senior officials to move beyond daily reports and presentations, and instead assess first-hand how government policies, programmes and public funds.



DAY 2: Deputy Minister Swarts at St Stephens Anglican Church in Mogwase to advance the one million trees programme.

Deputy Minister Swarts also engaged directly with staff members, providing an opportunity for open dialogue about the respective roles they play within the department. The interaction underscored the importance of collaboration, accountability and continued support by senior leaders in ensuring the successful implementation of DFFE programmes in the province.

Day 2

The St Stephens Anglican Church in Mogwase was Deputy Minister Swarts first stop on 8 January 2026. The visit to the church was aimed at advancing the one million trees programme as the church site formed part of the One Million Trees campaign held on Heritage Day, 24 September 2025 — a milestone initiative that saw South Africans plant one million trees in a single day.

Reaffirming the DFFE's commitment to advancing President Cyril Ramaphosa's pledge to plant trees, Deputy Minister Swarts announced that plans are underway to plant five million trees in a single day this year.

“South Africans have demonstrated that when different stakeholders work together, it is possible to plant one million trees in a single day. This year, I once again call on all South Africans to partner with us to ensure that we plant five million trees in a single day,” said Deputy Minister Swarts.

The second day also saw the deputy minister visiting the Rustenburg Waste Tyre Depot in Tlhabane. The facility which is supported by the Waste Bureau plays a strategic role in managing waste tyres and advancing South Africa's circular waste economy. During her tour of the depot, Deputy Minister Swarts got an opportunity to engage with black-owned SMME's which operate within the waste tyre ecosystem.



About the contributor: Merle Van Diemel

Mr Tshегоfatso Ndhlovu is a Senior Communications Officer in the Communications and Advocacy Chief Directorate. He holds an Advanced Diploma in Journalism from the Tshwane University of Technology and is an avid sports fan with his favourites being Tennis and Formula 1.



DAY 2: Deputy Minister Swarts visited the Rustenburg Waste Tyre Depot in Tlhabane.

While acknowledging progress within the sector, Deputy Minister Swarts called for even greater inclusion of women and youth-owned enterprises in the waste tyre value chain, particularly through expanded services to rural communities.

Day 3

Deputy Minister Swarts concluded her visit to the North West Province with a community clean-up campaign in Tlhabane, Rustenburg where she received supported from residents, representatives from the Rustenburg Local Municipality and DFFE officials.

Emphasising the importance of a clean and healthy environment, Deputy Minister Swarts called on all residents of South Africa to participate in governments efforts to keep our communities clean as clean environments contribute not only to public health and improved air quality but also to socio-economic upliftment.

“To advance the attainment of an inclusive waste economy, residents must understand that waste is gold. Collecting cans or bottles and selling them to recycling companies can create jobs and business opportunities within communities,” said Deputy Minister Swarts.



DAY 2: Deputy Minister Swarts visited the Rustenburg Waste Tyre Depot in Tlhabane.



Minister Aucamp Sows Seeds of Change at Khayelitsha

By Merle Van Diemel



Above: Minister Willie Aucamp and Asez WAO Director, Mr Ezra Baek busy planting a tree. Photo: Merle Van Diemel.



Above: A partnership for sustainability: Minister Aucamp and Asez WAO Director, Mr Ezra Baek commit to a greener future.

The Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp, participated in a special tree-planting ceremony at Khayelitsha Hospital on Sunday, 1 February 2026.

The event was hosted by Asez WAO (Save the Earth from A to Z, We Are One Family) as part of their global "Mother's Forest" campaign. This initiative is an extension of their successful "Campaigns for Earth," which has resulted in the planting of 131 indigenous and fruit trees across various public schools, universities, care homes, and hospitals in the Cape Town metro.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Aucamp emphasized the profound importance of trees

beyond their environmental impact. "Trees are the very essence of life. They are the very air we breathe. They provide shade for special family moments," he said.

The Minister praised the organization's dedication to mobilizing young people, stating that such partnerships are vital for a sustainable future. In his closing remarks, he echoed the campaign's heartfelt vision: "I believe that we will change humanity and the earth with the mother's love."

He extended gratitude to Asez WAO Director, Mr Ezra Baek, and the dedicated team of volunteers and partners who made this meaningful contribution to the Khayelitsha community possible.



Strengthening SA's Bioprospecting Economy Through Collaboration



By Katedi Mantsho

South Africa's rich biodiversity continues to present significant opportunities for inclusive economic development, particularly through the growth of the bioprospecting and biotrade sector. In this context, the recent BioPANZA Clusters Meeting marked an important milestone in advancing a more coordinated, responsive, and impactful approach to supporting biodiversity-based enterprises.

BioPANZA (BioProducts Advancement Network South Africa), a Tripartite initiative led by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI), and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (the dtic), was established to align efforts across government and stakeholders in strengthening value chains within the bioprospecting economy.

The Clusters Meeting brought together a diverse range of stakeholders across the BioPANZA clusters—spanning sustainable supply, innovation, market access, and finance and policy and legislation. The objective was clear: to reflect on progress since the launch of BioPANZA in September 2025, identify key challenges, and collectively shape a practical way forward for the sector.

A key highlight of the engagement was the use of a World Café approach, which created an interactive and inclusive platform for dialogue. Through structured discussions, participants were able to share insights, identify gaps across value chains, and propose targeted interventions to support Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), particularly those operating in rural and community contexts.

Central to these discussions was the recognition that while the sector holds immense potential, there is a need for strengthened coordination across support mechanisms, improved access to markets, and enhanced enterprise development support. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of practical, implementable solutions—ranging from increased participation in trade platforms such as the African Biotrade Festival, to targeted training, innovation support, and improved access to finance.

Importantly, the outcomes of the session reaffirmed BioPANZA as a key coordination mechanism in driving a more inclusive and sustainable bioprospecting economy. By bringing stakeholders together in a structured and solutions-oriented manner, the platform continues to unlock opportunities for collaboration, alignment, and impact.

As the BioPANZA clusters move forward, the focus will be on translating these discussions into action—ensuring that the identified priorities are implemented in a way that meaningfully supports MSMEs, strengthens value chains, and contributes to South Africa's broader economic and environmental objectives.

The momentum generated through this engagement signals a positive step towards a more integrated and thriving biotrade sector—one that not only harnesses the country's natural heritage but also delivers tangible benefits for its people.

National Workshop Charts Course for NBSAP Revision

By Dimakatso Tsutsubi and Malepo Phoshoko

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment's Biodiversity and Conservation branch convened a pivotal Joint Working Groups and Interdepartmental consultation on the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) on 25 February 2026 at the Holiday Inn, Johannesburg Airport. Led by Ms Mohlago Flora Mokgohloa, Deputy Director-General: Biodiversity and Conservation within the department, the workshop drew active participation from all provinces and entities, reflecting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to revising South Africa's biodiversity roadmap.

The workshop opened with an overview highlighting the urgency to revise South Africa's NBSAP in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). Adopted in 2022, the KMGBF responds to global assessments showing unprecedented biodiversity loss—25% of species threatened and one million facing extinction. Key drivers identified include land and sea use changes, climate change, pollution, direct exploitation of organisms, and invasion of alien species, with direct exploitation and land/sea use changes as the most intense factors.

Participants explored the requirements of the KMGBF, noting its vision, four long-term goals for 2050, mission, and 23 urgent global targets for action by 2030. South Africa's revised NBSAP is being aligned with national policy instruments such as the White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity, the National Biodiversity Assessment, and the National Biodiversity Framework, ensuring integration with development plans and sector policies.

The revision process was described as highly participatory, involving stakeholder consultations, thematic focus groups, and lessons learned from previous NBSAP iterations. Twelve thematic areas were established to identify high-level targets and activities. These include:

- Mainstreaming biodiversity;
- Restoration and invasive species;
- Ecosystem and species conservation;
- Human-wildlife conflict;
- Pollution and waste management;
- Ecological infrastructure and climate resilience;
- Access and benefit sharing;
- Biosafety and biotechnology; and
- Means of implementation and participation.



Above: Ms Mohlago Flora Mokgohloa, Deputy Director-General for Biodiversity and Conservation, addresses stakeholders during the NBSAP revision workshop in Johannesburg. Her leadership is central to aligning South Africa's national strategy with the 2030 Global Biodiversity Targets.

A robust monitoring system and biodiversity finance plan are central to the current revision, with measurable indicators and analysis of historical spending informing resource mobilisation. Donor-funding initiatives, such as the Global Environment Facility and Green Climate Fund, were noted for their role in supporting key activities.

In conclusion, Ms Mohlago Flora Mokgohloa reported actionable follow-ups: engaging the Department of Agriculture to integrate the Preservation and Development of Agricultural Land (PDAL) statute with NBSAP, submitting written inputs on the draft, and ensuring stakeholder engagement in the human-wildlife conflict strategy.

South Africa's commitment to revising its NBSAP demonstrates political will and readiness to meet international biodiversity obligations. The workshop's outcomes set a strong foundation for an inclusive, adaptive, and measurable biodiversity strategy, positioning South Africa as a proactive leader in global biodiversity conservation.

“The workshop opened with an overview highlighting the urgency to revise South Africa's NBSAP in alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF).”

Oceans-to-Land Programme Maps New Careers for Youth

By Kgothatso Magongwa

The provision of opportunities for young people, women, and persons living with disabilities is central to the Sustainable Oceans Economy Programme. In recent years, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), through the Chief Directorate for Oceans Economy and Project Management, has prioritised a range of high-impact initiatives aimed at advancing the Sustainable Oceans Economy. This commitment has been supported through collaboration with various divisions within the Department, as well as partnerships with other government entities and industry stakeholders.

The Oceans Economy Programme aim to increase participation in socio-economic opportunities through skills development, innovation and capacity building interventions while remaining grounded in sustainable development principles that balance environmental, economic, and social priorities.

Research showed that a lack of structured career guidance is a contributor to persistently high levels of unemployment in South Africa. Although there are many career options out there, Ocean Economy careers are often overlooked, hence awareness-raising, skills development and capacity-building programmes are critical. Young people in South Africa urgently need structured career assistance, coupled with opportunities to advance their

careers. Many young people, particularly those from rural inland regions including those rural communities far from the ocean, but within coastal provinces, are experiencing a loss of hope due to limited access to economic opportunities.

The Chief Directorate: Oceans Economy and Project Management firmly believes that, to meet the demands of both established and emerging ocean-based industries, young people ought to be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills and opportunities to experience the sector.

It is against this backdrop that, the OEPM Chief Directorate strongly advocates that South African young people, regardless of their proximity to the ocean, should be connected to the ocean sectors through advocacy and training initiatives, as the Ocean Economy sector is considered an important economic frontier offering immense potential for inclusive growth and employment. Compared to other sectors of the national economy, the ocean economy sector is complex, diverse, and a connection needs to be established between all sub-sectors (e.g. marine transport and manufacturing, aquaculture, coastal and marine tourism) of the broader ocean economy sector and young people to be granted access to opportunities within this sector.

The Chief Directorate Oceans Economy annually conducts the Oceans-to-Land Programme Essay



Above: Thirty learners, ten educators from five (5) inland provinces, and the TNPA officials in Cape Town, National Ports Authority House.



Above: TNPA Official, Michael Melato addressing the thirty learners, ten educators from five (5) inland provinces, National Ports Authority House, Cape Town.

Competition which seeks to provide opportunities and exposure to young people from rural inland regions through promotion and capacity building on Sustainable Oceans Economy sector..

This high-impact intervention is held annually in Cape Town, usually in March every year, where thirty (30) learners including ten (10) educators from five inland provinces namely Free State, Gauteng, North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga get to experience the sector for the first time and in real-time.

This year, the Programme took place from 1-4 March 2026 in Cape Town and the department partnered with following industry players:

- Sandock Austral Shipyards;
- Linsen Nambi;
- DAMEN Shipyards Cape Town;
- Sea Harvest Foundation;
- Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation;
- V&A Waterfront Cape Town;
- Pull North Yachting – Superyacht Training;
- Transnet National Ports Authority Cape Town;
- as well as
- Blue Cape.

The Intensive Programme takes place over two (2) days in Cape Town, during which participants, for the first time, gain practical exposure to the rapidly growing Oceans Economy sector through high-impact site visits which include: DAMEN Shipyards South Africa, Two Oceans Aquarium, Marine Research Aquarium, and the Transnet National Ports Authority (TNPA). At DAMEN Shipyards South Africa, for example – the participants were exposed to a wide range of careers - marine engineering, welding, naval architecture, logistics, environmental management, and maritime safety - many of which are in high demand but poorly understood, especially by inland and rural learners. The visits to shipyards include presentations and hands-on, real-life exposure to shipyard operations).

Organisations such as Sandock Austral Shipyards (SAS), the largest shipbuilding company in Africa, also collaborate with the Department through partnerships and sponsorship of the two-day Programme..

The Project Lead for these interventions as well as other sustainable oceans economy programmes within the CD Oceans Economy, is Kgothatso Magongwa, a Gauteng native and long standing champion of the oceans economy, who is also pursuing a Master's degree in Cybersecurity in Marine Seaports. Mr Magongwa has developed and implemented various successful ocean economy initiatives that have made a huge impact and garnered significant industry support. Mr Magongwa, previously championed a three-year boat and shipbuilding apprenticeship Programme between the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) and Sandock Austral Shipyards (SAS) for a group of 20 young people. The young beneficiaries acquired formal qualifications whilst in the Programme and to date, the majority of participants have secured permanent employment both locally and abroad. This demonstrates how structured training programmes within the maritime sector effectively prepare young professionals for careers in international trade and shipping operations.

Mr Magongwa and team is an example of DFFE's youth, coordinating and implementing initiatives empowering many other young people.

Right: Mr Kgothatso Magongwa facilitating discussions during the Limpopo educators and Provincial officials Oceans Economy Skills Development and Capacity Building Initiative, Limpopo.



About the contributor: Kgothatso Magongwa

Mr Kgothatso Magongwa is a Project Coordinator in the Oceans Economy Chief Directorate, responsible for coordinating and implementing projects that support youth, women, and persons living with disabilities.

Braille Coastal Signage Launched for Accessibility

By Merle Van Diemel



A moment of discovery: Ms Hanlie Stelhi a visually impaired visitor reads the new Braille and tactile signage at Blaauwberg Nature Reserve. Minister Aucamp, partners from WESSA, Nedbank, the City of Cape Town, NCPD, BlindSA, and guests share in this milestone occasion.

South Africa's coastline is a treasured national asset, and a recent innovation at the Blaauwberg Nature Reserve ensures it is now a space that truly belongs to everyone.

On 11 February 2026, the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp, officially unveiled the region's first Braille interpretive beach signage. This landmark initiative marks a significant step toward making our coastal environments fully accessible to people with visual impairments.

Developed in partnership with WESSA, the City of Cape Town, Blind SA, and the National Council for Persons with Disabilities—with sponsorship from Nedbank—the new signage goes far beyond traditional information boards. By featuring Braille, raised tactile text, and QR codes that link to audio descriptions, these signs allow all visitors to engage with coastal stories through touch, sound, and feeling.



Above: Minister Willie Aucamp delivers the keynote address, with the original 'CoastCare' signage visible behind him symbolising the evolution from past foundations to a more inclusive future.



Partnership in action: Minister Aucamp joins Mr Ryan Peter (DFFE), Mr Abraham Allies (BlindSA), Ms Cindy Cloete (WESSA), Alderman Eddie Cloete (City of Cape Town), Mr Pedro Rhode (Nedbank), and representatives from NCPD at the official unveiling.

The launch featured a collaborative group of speakers, including Mr Ryan Peter (DFFE), Mr Abraham Allies (Blind SA), Ms Cindy Cloete (WESSA), Alderman Eddie Cloete (City of Cape Town), and Mr Pedro Rhode (Nedbank).

During the event, Minister Aucamp explained that the Department is moving from a philosophy of 'look and read' to one of 'touch, listen, feel and experience', adding that the project is ultimately about opening our natural heritage to every South African.

According to the Minister, this pilot project revitalises the Department's legacy "CoastCare" initiative by integrating modern technology and inclusivity. The panels share engaging stories of local wildlife, such as the African Black Oystercatcher, inviting discovery in entirely new ways.

Minister Aucamp highlighted that this initiative serves as a blueprint for future developments. There are already plans to roll out similar accessible signage at harbours and coastal sites.



From left: Ms Cindy-Lee Cloete (CEO, WESSA), Alderman Eddie Andrews (Deputy Mayor, City of Cape Town), and Minister Willie Aucamp (DFFE) at the Blaauwberg Nature Reserve launch site.

Minister Aucamp Intervenes to Save Fishing Jobs

Images by Heather Dugmore



For the coastal communities of South Africa, the ocean is more than just a resource—it is a lifeline. In a significant move to provide certainty and support to these communities, the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp, issued a high-priority directive on 20 February 2026 to finalise all appeals in the Traditional Linefish sector.

The directive came at a critical juncture. With current allocations set to expire on 28 February 2026, many small-scale fishers faced a period of deep uncertainty. Recognising the urgency, Minister Aucamp mandated that all appeals be concluded no later than 5 March 2026, ensuring that the wheels of governance turn swiftly enough to protect local economies.

[Twitter/X Post] @environmentza NEWS FLASH: Minister Willie Aucamp has directed the department to prioritise small-scale fishing appeals! Goal: Finalise all Traditional Linefish sector decisions by 5 March to ensure fair access and community stability.
#Fisheries #SmallScaleFishers #EnvironmentalJustice

A Balance of Empathy and Law

The Department received a high volume of appeals concerning the allocation of the Total Applied Effort (TAE). These appeals aren't just paperwork; they represent the procedural fairness and socio-economic well-being of families from Saldanha to Port St. Johns.

Minister Aucamp acknowledged the emotional weight of these decisions. "I understand the frustration and uncertainty that these decisions have created for Small-Scale Fishers," the Minister noted. "I want to assure them that their concerns are being approached with empathy and seriousness."

However, the Minister also emphasised that "good governance requires careful, lawful decision-making." By setting a firm 5 March deadline, the Department aimed to avoid a "livelihood gap," where fishers might be left without valid permits while waiting for administrative finalisation.

Safeguarding Future Generations

The appeals process is designed to evaluate whether outcomes were reasonable and if the decision-making process was followed correctly. It is a vital check-and-balance system that ensures South Africa's marine resources are managed sustainably.

While the immediate focus is on the current season, the DFFE remains committed to a balanced outcome—one that protects the socio-economic interests of today's fishers while conserving fish stocks for the generations of tomorrow.

The Road Ahead

As the EQ goes to print, this directive stands as a blueprint for how the Department intends to handle high-pressure administrative hurdles: with speed, empathy, and a strict adherence to the law. For the small-scale fishers who are the heartbeat of our coastline, this prioritisation is a clear signal that their voices are being heard.

SA and EU Strengthen Ties at Fisheries Workshop

By Merle Van Diemel

Experts from South Africa and the European Union gathered in Cape Town from 2 to 6 February 2026 for a high-level regional workshop focusing on EU import requirements for fishery products.

The session was a key part of the European Commission's Better Training for Safer Food (BTSF) initiative. This programme is specifically designed to help non-EU countries navigate and meet the rigorous standards required for EU market access.

Representing the DFFE, Ms. Andrea Bernatzeder delivered a comprehensive presentation, supported by several departmental officials. They were joined by delegates from 15 other countries, as well as representatives from South Africa's Department of Agriculture (DOA), the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS), and various industry stakeholders.

Addressing the delegates, H.E. Ms. Sandra Kramer, EU Ambassador to South Africa, emphasised the importance of the gathering. She noted that in a world of increasingly complex supply chains, trust is built through competence, transparency, and cooperation, describing the workshop as a "very concrete expression" of the partnership between the EU and South Africa.

Ms. Bernatzeder further highlighted the economic significance of these standards, stating that the EU market is of particular importance to South African fishery and aquaculture products. She added that meeting these requirements allows countries to realise the full value of their natural resources in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Ultimately, the workshop sought to deepen the understanding of EU food safety controls, ensure smoother compliance with import conditions, and strengthen the vital trade relations between participating nations and the European Union.



Above: International participants from 16 countries gathered in Cape Town for the EU Regional Workshop on Fishery Products Import Requirements and Controls.



Above: The DFFE delegation at the EU Fisheries Workshop in Cape Town. From left (front): Mss Portia Dwane, Hellen Ntoampe, Messrs Mayizole Majangaza, Sindisa Sigam and Nhlanhla Nkosi. From left (back): Mr John Foord, Mss Andrea Bernatzeder, Nkgabiseng Sejosengoe and Vianca Naidu.



Above: Ms. Andrea Bernatzeder addresses the delegates during the workshop.

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AQUACULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Freshwater fish farming in South Africa is defined by the term 'aquaculture' and describes the process of producing fish for food in freshwater systems such as dams, open and indoor ponds, recirculation systems and tanks.

South Africa's aquaculture industry currently consists of marine species such as:



Mussels



Oysters



Abalone



Finfish

Freshwater species farmed include:



Catfish



Tilapia



Trout



Marron Crayfish



Ornamental Fish

FISH BIOLOGY

Like any animal, a basic understanding of how fish function is necessary if one is to try to culture them. Fish are different to land animals as they have evolved to live in water, which makes movement, breathing, buoyancy and food or predator detection very different to that encountered on land. The structure of many fish includes streamlined bodies, fins and gills. Due to the organism's biology, conversion of feed into mass is more efficient than with land animals, when farmed in optimal environmental conditions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What water source is needed to farm fish?

A: Water is one of the key factors in successfully farming fish. Water sources could be dams, rivers, lakes, boreholes and even municipality water can be used to farm fish.

The amount and quality of water depends on the species being cultured. More information can be found in the generic feasibility studies on the department's website www.dffe.gov.za

Q: Is fish farming profitable?

A: Fish farming is a business just like any other, the growing of fish is only one aspect, just like the growing of crops is only one aspect of traditional farming.

The generic feasibility studies done by the department has the financial analysis for farming various species using different systems.

Q: If I have no money, can I start fish farming?

A: To start your own operation, some start-up capital is needed. Another option is to first gain experience on someone else's fish farm. A smallscale operation can develop into a viable business if carefully designed.

Q: What expertise do I need to undertake my own fish farming venture?

A: Hard work and preparedness are very important to start a fish farm. Having some type of aquaculture technical skills and expertise is important when venturing into the sector. The department has an aquaculture skills development guide which can assist.

Q: Is a filtration system necessary?

A: A filtration system is needed and depends on the technique and equipment used to culture a particular species. Extensive or semi-intensive earth ponds are generally unfiltered. Many raceway systems are flow-through with no filter. Where water volume is limited, or the fish are cultured intensively, a filter becomes vital to maintain water quality.

Q: Is predator protection vital or a luxury?

A: It is essential to have protection against animal predators as they can reduce stocks to almost nil if allowed unlimited access to the ponds or tanks. Fish farms in areas near human habitation also needs protection against theft of the stock (fencing and alarms).



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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A NATION THAT WORKS FOR ALL



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