ENVIRONMENT MONTH SPECIAL EDITION - JUNE 2026

Environment Quarterly

Ezemvelo Ngekota ● Tikologo ka Kotara ● Okusingqongileyo Ngekota

Kruger National Park Marks Century of Conservation

SA, Namibia Strengthen Fisheries Enforcement Partnership

From Rural Dreams to Ocean Research

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Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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2030 NDP

GOOD GREEN DEEDS

ENVIRONMENTAL CALENDAR 2026

JANUARY

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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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GOOD GREEN DEEDS

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About the back cover image:

The Camdeboo National Park

The Camdeboo National Park is located in the Karoo and almost completely surrounds the Eastern Cape town of Graaff-Reinet. It contains the Nqweba Dam.

The park is located on the southern foothills of the Sneeuberg Mountain ranges, with an elevation of between 740 and 1480 metres above sea level.

Camdeboo National Park was proclaimed as South Africa's 22nd National Park under the management of South African National Parks on Sunday 30 October 2005. It covers an area of 194 square kilometres.

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

NAPM RECYCLED 100% APPROVED

Editorial

Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For our future

Dear Valued Stakeholder,

Welcome to the June Edition of the Environment Quarterly. I love this month very much because it reminds us of the beautiful bond between people and nature.

In South Africa, we celebrate Environment Month every June. This year, the Department hosted many great events across our country that helped teach people how to protect our land, look after our oceans, and care for our marine animals.

This quarter also brought big changes in our department as we bid a warm farewell to our Former Minister, Willie Aucamp and gave a happy welcome to our new Minister, David Maynier.

We also want to share some exciting green projects with you! Have you heard about our national 1 Billion Trees campaign led by Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts and do you think you can help us plant 1 billion trees? Please use the QR code on the poster on page 7 to make your pledge and help us build a greener and better South Africa.

We are also very passionate about creating awareness on green jobs so Polokwane get ready! The Green Careers Expo 2026 is coming to the Ngoako Ramatlhodi Sports Ground in Seshego on 06 July. It will be a fantastic event, and we hope to see you there!

Another amazing young person making waves is Sibusisile Kheswa, our "seabirds girl" who is breaking stereotypes by working in a very unique field. She followed her passion to care for nature. Please read her inspiring interview on page 14 to learn more about her journey.

Looking ahead, please watch out for the Aquaculture cookout in our next issue, which will be an exciting culinary experience held in the Eastern Cape. We will share the event and cooking on our social media pages, so make sure you follow us there.

In the next issue, we will also introduce you to our next generation of ocean leaders, Vhukhudo Victor Mukwevho and Tshiembe Lusani Mathagu who are two brilliant students who joined the department for training and are now sailing as cadets on our research ship to learn how to become ship captains. They are doing an outstanding job out at sea, proving that you can dream big with DFFE!

Enjoy the read.

Until next time,

Erica

Meet our team

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TEAM DFFE

Welcomes

Minister David Maynier

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DFFE VALUES

Kruger National Park Marks Century of Conservation

By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu

"We are walking in the footsteps of giants. Their vision, perseverance and deep, abiding love for nature gave us the Kruger National Park. They dreamed beyond their time of vast landscapes where elephants roam, lions rule, and the ancient rhythms of the wild echo through the bush for generations to come. As a united people, that legacy now rests in our hands."

Above: Former Minister Aucamp unveils the centenary plaque alongside SANParks Chief Executive Officer Ms Hapiloe Sello, Interim Board Chairperson Ms Beryl Ferguson, and Kruger National Park Managing Executive Mr Oscar Mthimkulu.

Above: In an effort to strengthen Kruger National Park's fight against wildlife crime, the Pure Wild Fund donated Polaris Ranger vehicles to the park.

With these words, former Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Willie Aucamp, officially unveiled the Kruger National Park 100-Year Commemoration Plaque during the park's centenary celebrations on 31 May 2026.

The Kruger National Park has a rich conservation history dating back to the late 1800s, when the Sabie Game Reserve was proclaimed to protect the rapidly declining wildlife of the Lowveld from uncontrolled hunting. In 1926, under the National Parks Act, the Kruger National Park was established, becoming South Africa's first national park. Over the past century, it has grown into a global conservation icon, playing a pivotal role in protecting biodiversity, preserving cultural heritage and advancing scientific research.

Today, the Kruger National Park remains the flagship park of the South African National Parks (SANParks) system and one of Africa's most celebrated wildlife conservation areas. Covering nearly two million hectares across Mpumalanga and Limpopo, the park is home to an extraordinary diversity of plant and animal species and is renowned worldwide as the home of the Big Five. It continues to attract visitors from across the globe while serving as a stronghold for biodiversity conservation, environmental education and sustainable ecotourism.

Against this backdrop, the centenary programme highlighted the park's historical significance, conservation achievements and contribution to tourism, scientific research and socio-economic development.

Beneficiation Scheme Agreements:

The celebrations commenced on 29 May 2026 with the signing of Beneficiation Scheme agreements between SANParks and land claimant communities of the Kruger National Park. The scheme forms part of broader settlement agreements aimed at addressing historical land dispossession and follows nearly a decade of negotiations and deliberations. Through the initiative, SANParks seeks to create structured access to commercial and non-commercial opportunities for qualifying communities. These include participation in concessions, enterprise and supplier development, bursary funding, skills transfer and long-term livelihood opportunities linked to the park's economy.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Minister Aucamp described the agreement as a significant step towards restoration, empowerment and inclusive development.

"Today, we turn an often-sensitive matter, land, into a story of victory and resilience. Land is more than just the soil and rocks beneath our feet. It represents bloodlines, legacy and heritage. It is the very soil on which one's grandparents and great-grandparents once lived, dreamed, worked the land and enjoyed fruit under the shade of the trees" said former Minister Aucamp.

Echoing the importance of restitution and inclusion, SANParks Interim Board Chairperson Ms Beryl Ferguson said: "SANParks recognises that restitution is not only about financial compensation. It is about restoring dignity, enabling participation, and ensuring that conservation delivers meaningful value to those who were historically excluded." She added that the Beneficiation Scheme reflects SANParks' commitment to fairness, transparency and long-term sustainability, while signalling a shift from commitments to implementation.

The official signing ceremony was followed by the donation of Polaris Ranger vehicles by the Pure Wild Fund in support of the park's ongoing efforts to combat wildlife crime. The vehicles will strengthen operational capacity by improving mobility and response times for rangers and anti-poaching teams operating across the vast protected area.
The centenary celebrations culminated on 30 May 2026 with a gala dinner held at the Nombolo Mdluli Conference Centre at Skukuza Rest Camp. Under the theme: Our Heritage, Our Future, the evening honoured generations of rangers, scientists, conservationists, community members and leaders whose dedication has shaped one of the world's most iconic protected areas.

Beyond celebrating the park's rich legacy, the event reaffirmed South Africa's commitment to environmental sustainability, inclusivity and the preservation of shared natural heritage.

Above: The centenary celebrations also included an award ceremony that honoured the dedicated staff of Kruger National Park for their contribution to conservation and the park's success over the past century.

Future of Conservation:

Above: Former Minister Willie Aucamp leads representatives of seven land claimant communities during the signing of the Beneficiation Scheme agreements.

Reflecting on the future of conservation, former Minister Aucamp emphasised the importance of integrating conservation with community development. "Conservation must exist within society. It must contribute to sustainable livelihoods. It must support development. And it must reflect the values of inclusion and dignity. We have now added a fourth leg, which is community involvement, and as you would agree with me, any table with four legs is more stable than one with three. This will be the future of the park."

The centenary also served as a reminder that successful conservation depends on balancing environmental protection with social and economic development. This message was reinforced by SANParks Chief Executive Officer Ms Hapiloe Sello, who highlighted both the achievements and lessons of the past century.

"Kruger National Park's centenary is both a moment of commemoration and reflection. It honours extraordinary conservation achievements while also acknowledging lessons learned from the painful past of land dispossession and displacement. As we look ahead, our focus is firmly on inclusive conservation models that ensure national parks deliver lasting value for both nature and people."
As the Kruger National Park embarks on its second century, stakeholders have reaffirmed the importance of partnerships, community participation and inclusive conservation approaches. The centenary celebrations not only honoured a remarkable conservation legacy but also reinforced a shared vision for a future in which the park continues to benefit both nature and people while remaining one of South Africa's greatest national treasures.

About the contributor: Tshegofatso Ndhlovu

Mr Tshegofatso 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.

Local Action Drives Global Biodiversity Impact

By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu

Above: Deputy Minister Singh said the 2026 theme was a call to action for governments, businesses, communities and individuals to help halt and reverse biodiversity loss. He stressed that biodiversity conservation is not only about protecting nature but also about securing livelihoods and supporting sustainable development.

Above: The programme also featured a One Billion Trees planting initiative led by Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts, demonstrating government's commitment to ecosystem restoration and environmental sustainability.

"South Africa's National Biodiversity Stewardship Programme is a people-centred conservation mechanism that empowers local communities to actively manage and conserve natural resources, transforming grassroots environmental action into meaningful global impact," said Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Narend Singh, during the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) 2026 Global Flagship Event held at Beechwood Gardens in Gauteng on 22 May 2026.

South Africa strengthened its standing as a global leader in biodiversity conservation when it became the first country invited by the Secretariat of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) to host the International Day for Biological Diversity Global Flagship Event. Held under the theme: Acting Locally for Global Impact, the event highlighted how local action can drive global biodiversity progress.

Occupying only 2% of the planet's landmass, South Africa carries a disproportionately massive weight on the global stage as one of only 17 officially designated "megadiverse" nations. From the fynbos of the Cape Floristic Region to expansive savannas, wetlands and productive coastlines, South Africa's biodiversity supports livelihoods, drives tourism, contributes to economic development and strengthens resilience to climate change. Protecting these natural assets is increasingly important as environmental pressures continue to grow worldwide.

Observed annually on 22 May, the International Day for Biological Diversity commemorates the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. The day raises awareness about biodiversity conservation and mobilises support for implementing the Convention, its Protocols and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Addressing delegates from across the world, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ms Astrid Schomaker, highlighted the wider benefits of biodiversity conservation.

"Protecting biodiversity is about protecting nature, livelihoods, well-being, food security and addressing the impacts of climate change. The International Day for Biological Diversity is your day; it is everyone's day," said Ms Schomaker.

The global flagship event formed part of a broader programme focused on strengthening biodiversity governance. Ahead of the celebration, government leaders, scientists, conservation practitioners and biodiversity experts participated in the Biodiversity Governance Lekgotla and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Consultative Conference. These engagements focused on strengthening collaboration, advancing biodiversity governance and building consensus on South Africa's revised biodiversity priorities and implementation measures. South Africa's successful hosting of the International Day for Biological Diversity Global Flagship Event reinforced the country's leadership in biodiversity conservation and demonstrated how local action can deliver meaningful global impact.

1 Billion Trees

A PRESIDENTIAL CALL TO ACTION

MY TREE, MY OXYGEN. PLANT YOURS TODAY.

PLAY YOUR PART AND CONTRIBUTE TO REFORESTATION EFFORTS TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY!

SCAN THE QR CODE TO DONATE AND ACCESS OUR TREE CATALOGUE

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One Billion Trees

GOOD GREEN DEEDS

Restoring Rangelands, Securing Water and Livelihoods

By Merle Van Diemel

South Africa joined the global community in commemorating World Environment Day 05 June, and Desertification and Drought Day on 17 June 2026, reaffirming its commitment to climate action, sustainable land management and biodiversity conservation.

Delivering the keynote address during the event held in Northern Cape Province, Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Ms Bernice Swarts highlighted the significance of the joint celebration under the themes Climate Action and Rangelands: Recognise. Respect. Restore. She reminded participants that "protecting our environment is a local imperative that directly affects our livelihoods, our economy and our future." Hosted by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), in partnership with the Department of Agriculture (DoA), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Sol Plaatje University, the event took place in Rietfontein, Dawid Kruiper Local Municipality, Northern Cape. Community members from Rietfontein, Philandersbron, Groot Mier, Klein Mier, Loubos, Askham and Andriesvale attended the commemoration, which focused on the role of rangelands in supporting biodiversity, food and water security, livelihoods and economic development.

A key highlight was the handover of two fully functional boreholes to the communities of Rietfontein and Philandersbron, both severely affected by drought. The infrastructure will provide reliable access to clean drinking water for households and livestock.

"We are very happy today that we are able to provide water, which is life, to the communities here," said Deputy Minister Swarts. She added that the project will also create opportunities for 84 young people through invasive plant-clearing programmes.

"This project is not just about boreholes. It is an integrated approach that combines land restoration, water provision, job creation and skills development," she said.

The borehole handover forms part of the GEF-7-funded Mainstreaming Sustainable Land Management project. Achievements include mapping 700 hectares of invasive species for clearing, training 84 beneficiaries in invasive species removal, equipping 44 farmers with sustainable land management skills, capacitating 144 officials, planting 700 fruit trees under the One Billion Trees Programme and creating 10 temporary jobs through the Small Grants Programme.

MEC Lebogang Motlhaping stressed that healthy ecosystems are essential for food production, water security and resilience, while IUCN Project Manager Miyelani Nkwanyana noted that rangelands are fundamentally about "communities, livelihoods and opportunities."

Closing the event, Deputy Minister Swarts said South Africa was building a sustainable future through partnerships and community-led action that recognise, respect and restore rangelands for future generations.

JUNE IS ENVIRONMENT MONTH
#NowForClimate
05 JUNE WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
08 JUNE WORLD OCEANS DAY
17 JUNE DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT DAY
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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
UN environment programme
WORLD OCEANS DAY 2026
United Nations

Strengthening Maritime Security Through Dialogue

By Dr Motseki Hlatshwayo, Mr Saasa Pheeha and Mr Haresh Inderlall

Above: Deputy Minister Singh participating in the IUCN Technical Dialogue on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Maritime Security, held in Mombasa, Kenya, on 17 June 2026.

Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Mr Narend Singh, has called for stronger regional cooperation to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing during the 11th Our Ocean Conference held in Mombasa, Kenya, from 16 to 18 June 2026.

Representing South Africa as Chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Singh joined African Ministers, senior government officials and international partners in discussions on fisheries governance, maritime security and ocean sustainability. Addressing a high-level side event on regional leadership in fisheries management, he stressed the need for collective action.

"The theme is fundamental to our food security, coastal livelihoods, economic development and the future of a sustainable blue economy. It requires regional leadership and collective action," said Deputy Minister Singh.

Hosted in Africa for the first time, the conference highlighted regional cooperation, transparency and African-led solutions to shared ocean challenges. A key side event, co-organised by the SADC Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Coordination Centre (MCSCC) and the Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea (FCWC), brought together Ministers from Angola, Mozambique, Namibia and Ghana, as well as senior officials from Nigeria and Liberia.

Delegates shared examples of how regional cooperation and intelligence-sharing have strengthened efforts to combat illegal fishing. Case studies involving the vessels PREMIER and NOVA ZEELANDIA demonstrated how collaboration between Southern and West African countries has improved investigations and enforcement action.
Sharing South Africa's experience, Deputy Minister Singh highlighted the importance of partnerships. "The most important lesson in deterring IUU fishing is that no single institution, technology or country can address IUU fishing alone," he said.

He explained that South Africa has adopted an integrated approach involving fisheries authorities, law-enforcement agencies, maritime security institutions and other government departments. The country's monitoring, control and surveillance system includes vessel monitoring systems, fisheries observers, catch reporting, port inspections, electronic permitting and compliance monitoring.
While technology has strengthened enforcement efforts, Singh emphasised that effective action depends on rapid information-sharing, coordinated responses and strong regional cooperation. South Africa has therefore reaffirmed its support for the full operationalisation of the SADC Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Coordination Centre.

In closing, Singh said enforcement must be accompanied by sustainable fisheries management and economic opportunities for coastal communities.

"Where communities benefit from healthy fish stocks and legitimate economic opportunities, they become important partners in detecting and preventing illegal activity," he said.

The conference concluded with a strong call for regional integration, shared intelligence and coordinated action to protect marine resources, support coastal livelihoods and advance a sustainable blue economy across Africa.

SA, Namibia Strengthen Fisheries Enforcement Partnership

By Merle Van Diemel

Above: Participating officials from DFFE and Namibian MAFWLR following the successful conclusion of the Joint Operation at Nakop Port of Entry.

Above: Confiscated fish products are being examined during joint operation.

"This joint operation demonstrates a strong relationship between South Africa and Namibia in protecting our shared aquatic living resources and strengthening border security cooperation," said Acting Director of Fisheries Protection Vessels at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), Mr Andile Moshani, as South Africa and Namibia launched their first joint fisheries compliance operation in the Orange River Basin held on 31 May to 8 June 2026.

The landmark operation, conducted under the Memorandum of Understanding on Fisheries and Aquaculture between the two countries, aimed to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing while strengthening the protection of shared aquatic resources and enhancing cooperation against cross-border crime.

Officially opening the operation, Mr Moshani said the initiative gave practical effect to the Joint Technical Committee Action Plan established under the Memorandum of Understanding. He added that the operation sent a clear message that illegal fishing and other transboundary crimes, including smuggling, wildlife trafficking, human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal migration, would not be tolerated.

The operation brought together DFFE, Namibia's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Land Reform (MAFWLR), and a range of partner agencies, including the South African Police Service (SAPS), the Border Management Authority (BMA), Port Health, Agriculture officials and the SARS Customs Detector Dog Unit.

Addressing officials during an operational briefing at Vioolsdrift, Operational Commander and DFFE Chief Marine Conservation Inspector, Mr Thulani Mthombeni, explained that enforcement efforts extended beyond border crossings and included intelligence-led interventions and river patrols where necessary. "We are not limited to the border itself – we can incorporate river patrols and respond wherever intelligence identifies potential illegal activities," he said.

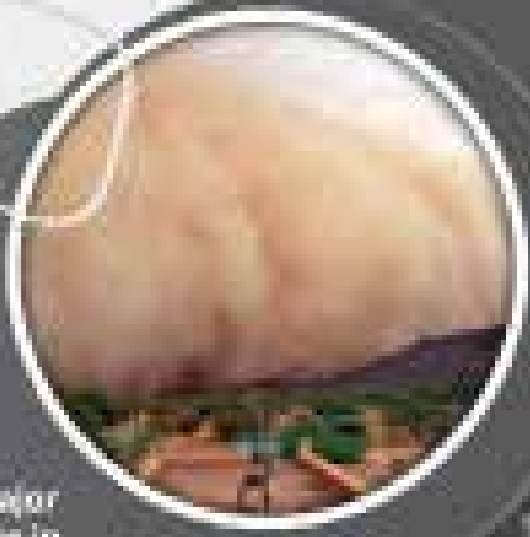
The operation was similarly welcomed by Namibia's Chief Marine Conservation Inspector, Mr Riaan Arendse, who described it as an important milestone in strengthening bilateral cooperation.

"This joint operation marks another significant step in strengthening bilateral cooperation in the sustainable management, protection and monitoring of our shared fisheries resources," said Mr Arendse.

During the eight-day operation, enforcement teams conducted inspections at the Nakop and Vioolsdrift Ports of Entry. Officials searched 773 vehicles, carried out 31 vehicle checkpoints and issued fines for contraventions of the Marine Living Resources Act. Teams also verified permits and documentation to prevent the illegal movement of fish and fishery products across the border.

Building on the success of the operation, both countries have committed to expanding future joint compliance activities, strengthening intelligence-sharing and deepening cooperation through the existing Memorandum of Understanding.

DUST POLLUTION



New Regulations Introduced for Cleaner Air!

Dust emissions are a major environmental challenge in South Africa, especially in industrial areas like the Highveld. The new Dust Control Regulations are here to strengthen compliance and protect our health! Let's work together for cleaner air.

Community Involvement Crucial for Effective Dust Control!

The recently gazetted Dust Control Regulations set clear standards for dust management, but we need to bridge the gap between regulation and community experience. Let's make compliance a shared responsibility!

Collaborative Efforts Needed for Improved Air Quality!

Together, we can amplify the message of the Dust Control Regulations! Partnerships with civil society and local organizations are key to ensuring our communities are heard. Let's unite for cleaner air!

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Take Action Now for Better Air Quality!

Dust pollution is often underestimated, but it impacts our health and environment significantly. Let's advocate for better monitoring and enforcement to protect our communities!

Air Quality: A Public Health Concern!

Air quality is a public health issue! It affects our children's health and our communities' dignity. We must act now to combat dust pollution!

Dust Pollution Affects Communities and Livelihoods!

Dust pollution impacts health, livelihoods, and quality of life. Communities near mining and construction sites face daily challenges. Let's support the National Dust Control Regulations for a healthier future!

National Dust Control Regulations Promote Health!

The National Dust Control Regulations are here! These regulations set limits on dust emissions, requiring industries to monitor and manage their impact. Together, we can breathe easier!

Transparency Ensures Community Awareness and Accountability!

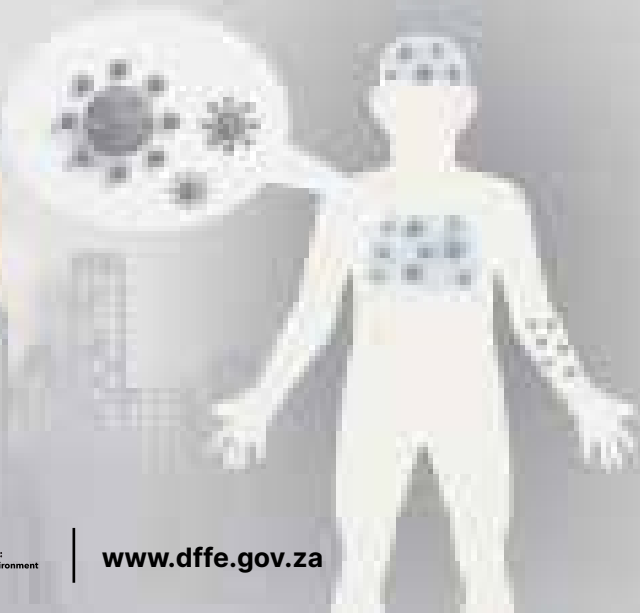
Transparency is key! Communities have the right to know about dust emissions in their environment. With improved monitoring and reporting, we're ensuring accountability and access to information.

Immediate Action Required for Dust Emissions!

Immediate action is crucial! When dust limits are exceeded, industries must take swift action. Let's hold them accountable for the health of our communities!

Join Us for Clean Air Advocacy!
Join us in advocating for clean air!

Together, we can push for better regulations and healthier environments for all.



#CommunityEngagement
#DustRegulations
#EnvironmentalRights

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Driving Growth Through Environmental Stewardship

By Merle Van Diemel

Above: Former Minister Willie Aucamp, Deputy Minister Narend Singh and Director-General Nomfundo Tshabalala and the Department's Deputy Directors-General following the 2026/27 Budget Vote presentation in Parliament.

Above: Former Minister Willie Aucamp and Deputy Ministers Narend Singh and Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts led the Department's 2026/27 Budget Vote, outlining priorities for environmental stewardship, economic growth and sustainable development.

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) used its 2026/27 Budget Vote to reaffirm its commitment to protecting South Africa's environment while creating jobs, supporting communities and unlocking economic opportunities.

Presenting DFFE's R9.127 billion budget, former Minister Willie Aucamp emphasised that although the Department receives just 0.38% of the national budget, it continues to play a vital role in delivering on government's priorities.

"We must be recognised as a key sector in unlocking growth and opportunity, in line with our national priorities," he said. To support this vision, the budget includes R960 million for the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which is expected to create more than 71 000 work opportunities.

A further R53.5 million has been allocated to air quality management and the implementation of the Climate Change Act, while fisheries received R514 million, including R130 million for scientific surveys. In addition, DFFE continues to modernise service delivery through initiatives such as the e-fishing system.

Deputy Minister Singh highlighted South Africa's hosting of the global flagship event for the International Day for Biological Diversity and the addition of more than 320 000 hectares to the country's conservation estate, including the declaration of the Agulhas Plains as a Ramsar site.

He also pointed to the Municipal Environmental Graduates Programme, which now supports 540 graduates across 205 municipalities, while DFFE aims to create 397 000 additional jobs in the biodiversity economy by 2036. At the same time, environmental compliance continues to be strengthened through 3 559 Environmental Management Inspectors.

Similarly, Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts highlighted DFFE's commitment to transformation, climate resilience and pollution reduction while empowering communities through environmental programmes. Turning to community-driven initiatives, Deputy Minister Swarts highlighted the successful planting of 1.3 million trees during the 2025 National Greening Programme and the target of planting 10 million indigenous trees this year through the Presidential One Billion Trees Programme.

Meanwhile, in waste management, DFFE's e-waste programme collected more than 86 tonnes of electronic waste while paying communities R267 700 in incentives. In a further milestone, the South African Weather Service enabled South Africa to become the first G20 country to launch a National Early Warning Roadmap.

Collectively, the Budget Vote presentations demonstrated that environmental stewardship is not only about protecting South Africa's natural heritage but also about creating jobs, empowering communities and driving sustainable economic growth for present and future generations.

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.

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From Rural Dreams to Ocean Research

By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu

For many young South Africans growing up far from the coast, a career in marine science can seem unimaginable. Yet for Sibusisile Kheswa, that seemingly distant dream became a remarkable reality. What began as a curiosity about wildlife and a desire to travel the world has evolved into a career dedicated to understanding and protecting marine ecosystems. Today, as a **Seabirds Field Assistant**, she conducts research in some of the planet's most remote environments while inspiring others through her growing science communication platform. Her journey is a powerful reminder that passion, resilience and self-belief can turn even the most unlikely dreams into reality.

1. What first sparked your interest in the ocean and marine science?

My interest in the ocean and marine science grew from a lifelong passion for animals and the environment, as well as a desire to explore beyond the rural community where I grew up. School textbooks and documentaries introduced me to fascinating marine environments and wildlife, inspiring me to pursue a career connected to the ocean.

2. Tell us about your journey into marine science.

My academic journey began in high school, where I focused on biology and natural sciences to build a strong foundation for a career in marine science. Growing up in a rural area with limited exposure to this specialised field, I had to actively seek information, guidance and opportunities to understand the career path. Being far from the ocean also meant that gaining practical experience required extra determination and initiative.

3. For someone outside the field, how would you describe what a marine scientist is?

A marine scientist's work can vary greatly depending on the specific role, but at its core, it involves studying the ocean and the organisms that live in it and using that knowledge to support conservation and the sustainable use of marine resources.

4. Did you always believe this career was possible for you, or did that confidence come at a later stage?

No, I was not always confident that this career was possible for me. Growing up in a rural area, marine biology felt distant and unfamiliar. However, as I progressed academically and gained exposure through different experiences, my confidence grew. Each opportunity strengthened my self-belief and showed me that this was a career I could pursue and succeed in.

Above: Sibusisile at the Trypot Gentoo Penguin colony, conducting a census and breeding chronology study (tracking the breeding cycle of penguins from egg-laying through to chick development).

5. What did you study, and how did your studies prepare you for the kind of work you're doing today?

I studied Marine Biology, which provided a strong foundation in marine ecosystems and the biology of marine organisms. Completing my Honours degree further developed my ability to conduct independent research, manage projects, solve problems, and strengthen my analytical and scientific writing skills—capabilities that are essential in my work today.

6. What was your first experience like stepping onto the research vessel SA Agulhas II?

My first experience on the SA Agulhas II was during an open day in Cape Town while I was a DFFE intern. As part of the ushering team, I helped guide visitors while learning about the vessel. I was impressed by its advanced capabilities, and the experience deepened my appreciation for marine research and strengthened my interest in the field.

7. What does a typical day look like for you while out at sea on an expedition?

A typical day at sea starts with a morning briefing to discuss the day's activities, weather conditions and safety updates. The team then carries out scientific tasks, which may include monitoring seabird species, conducting population counts, observing behaviour and collecting data. We also maintain equipment, record observations and ensure field notes are up to date. Teamwork, communication and adaptability are essential, as every day brings different challenges and opportunities.

8. What are some of the biggest physical or mental challenges that you have faced working on a vessel, out at sea and far from the comforts of home?

One of the biggest challenges has been the mental and emotional adjustment to spending long periods away from home, family and familiar routines. Working at sea also requires constant focus, as conditions can change quickly and the work demands attention to detail. In addition, living and working closely with a small team requires strong communication, patience and adaptability.

9. What inspired you to start documenting your journey through your TikTok series?

I started documenting my journey because opportunities like this are not widely known in the community where I grew up. I wanted to show people experiences and environments they may never have been exposed to. Seeing comments from people who did not know penguins existed outside of movies made me realise the importance of sharing knowledge and educating others. Through my TikTok series, I hope to inspire people and show that careers in marine science are real and achievable.

10. What advice would you give to young people who want to pursue marine science?

Stay curious and never let your background limit your ambitions. Build a strong foundation in science subjects such as biology and geography, and actively seek out learning opportunities. Be open to unexpected paths, as marine science can lead to exciting experiences in places and roles you may never have imagined.

QUICK FACTS WITH SIBU

- **Must-have item on every expedition:** Good sunscreen.
- **Most unexpected encounter while on duty:** Getting bitten by a penguin.
- **Favourite animal spotted in the wild:** Cape (Pintado) Petrel.
- **Go-to comfort routine in remote places:** Movie nights with the team.
- **Expedition theme song:** Particula by Major Lazer & DJ Maphorisa featuring Nasty C, Ice Prince and Patoranking.

Cleaner Air Through Stronger Dust Controls

By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu
Image by Pixabay

Section 24 of the South African Constitution guarantees the right to an environment that is not harmful to the health or well-being of all who live in South Africa. The section also mandates that the environment be protected for present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures. In upholding this constitutional right, the South African government has made significant steps towards improving the quality of air that we breathe and protecting public health by publishing the National Dust Control Regulations, 2026 under the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act, 2004. Published on 31 March 2026, the new regulations replace the 2013 framework and introduce the country to a more proactive approach to managing dust pollution, particularly in sectors such as mining and construction.

Dust pollution remains one of South Africa's most persistent air quality challenges with communities living near mines, industrial facilities and construction sites constantly being exposed to elevated levels of particulate matter, which can contribute to respiratory illnesses, cardiovascular disease and aggravated asthma. Fine dust particles can penetrate deep into the lungs and even enter the bloodstream, posing the greatest risk to children, older persons and people living with pre-existing health conditions.

Delivering the keynote address at the 2026 the National Priority Areas Air Quality Summit, Deputy Minister for Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Ms Bernice Swarts emphasised that air quality is a social justice issue and a human rights issue.

"Section 24 of the Constitution places a responsibility on government, industry, civil society, academia and citizens to work together to reduce air pollution, improve environmental outcomes and advance environmental justice for all. Poor air quality affects the most vulnerable members of our society disproportionately. Children, the elderly, and individuals with existing respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses often bear the greatest burden of pollution. Clean air therefore remains fundamental to achieving sustainable development, improving public health, reducing inequality and building resilient communities," said Deputy Minister Swarts.

One of the most significant adjustments introduced by the new regulations is the move from a reactive to a preventative system.

"The 2026 National Dust Control Regulations represent a significant shift in South Africa's approach to dust management. By moving from reactive enforcement to proactive compliance, the regulations strengthen accountability through mandatory Dust Management Plans, improved monitoring standards, broader industry coverage and regular reporting. Together, these measures will enable authorities to better assess the effectiveness of dust control interventions while helping to protect public health and improve air quality," said National Air Quality Officer, Dr Patience Gwaze.

The regulations also modernise South Africa's dust monitoring framework by introducing updated monitoring methods and requiring more structured reporting. Monthly implementation reports, including information on dust control measures, complaints received and monitoring results where applicable, will provide authorities with improved oversight and accountability. Clearer dust fall standards and stronger enforcement provisions further reinforce the country's commitment to cleaner air.

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Get Involved: Join local volunteer efforts via the official Mandela Day platform (www.mandeladay.com) to find causes or donate to ongoing projects near you. For official government resources and activities, view the Nelson Mandela Month 2026 on www.gov.za/NelsonMandelaMonth2026.

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DFFE in Pictures

Deputy Minister Swarts Engages Working on Fire Participants

Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts hosted an engagement in Centurion with participants of the Working on Fire Expanded Public Works Programme on 25 June 2026. The engagement provided an important platform for dialogue, ensuring that participants' concerns were heard while promoting constructive engagement on issues affecting the programme. **By Zibuse Ndlovu.**

Clean Air Remains a National Priority

Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts led the National Priority Areas Air Quality Summit in Rustenburg, North West, bringing together stakeholders to strengthen collaboration, share solutions and advance efforts towards improved air quality management. Hosted under the theme "Collective Accountability for Clean Air: Clean Air Is Not a Privilege, but a Fundamental Right – Our Air, Our Life, Our Priority," the summit highlighted the importance of working together to protect communities and ensure a healthier environment for all. **By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu.**

Deputy Minister Singh Addresses Oceans Economy Indaba

Deputy Minister Narend Singh delivered the keynote address at the Rural Oceans Economy Indaba in Amathole on 24 June 2026. Hosted under the theme: Unlocking Coastal Opportunities: Partnerships for Community Growth, the Indaba brought together a diverse range of stakeholders from government, the private sector, academia and local communities, all united by a shared vision to harness the vast potential of the oceans economy for sustainable development and community beneficiation. **By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu.**

Global Dialogue on Ocean Governance

Deputy Minister Narend Singh participated in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Technical Dialogue on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, and Maritime Security, held in Mombasa, Kenya, on 17 June 2026. During the dialogue, Deputy Minister Singh highlighted the importance of strengthening international cooperation to promote sustainable ocean governance and maritime security.

Diplomacy and Climate Action in Berlin

Former Minister Willie Aucamp received a warm welcome from world leaders at the 2nd Berlin Climate Mobility Forum in Germany, hosted by the Global Centre for Climate Mobility and the Robert Bosch Stiftung Foundation. The forum brought together global voices to advance dialogue, collaboration and solutions on climate mobility and the impacts of climate change on communities worldwide.

Former Minister Aucamp also had the opportunity to personally extend his appreciation to the Honourable Roberto Albino, Mozambique's Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries, and Zimbabwe's Ambassador to Germany, Ms Alice Mashingaidze, for their countries' cooperation and swift response in supporting the arrest of suspects linked to the Kruger National Park double murders. **By Tshegofatso Ndhlovu.**

Strengthening South Africa's Abalone Sector

Former Minister Willie Aucamp visited an abalone farm on 12 June 2026 to engage with the Abalone Farmers Association of South Africa on the challenges facing the sector while exploring collaborative solutions to unlock its full potentialy. The former Minister reaffirmed his commitment to working closely with the sector to combat the illegal harvesting of natural resources, support the growth of the legal abalone industry and advance inclusive economic growth and job creation. **By Tshegofatso. Ndhlovu**

Community Voices Shape Cleaner Air

Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts, led an important dialogue on air quality in surrounding communities of Middelburg. The dialogue, which took place on 10 June 2026, in Hlalamnandi Community Hall in the Highveld Priority Area of Middelburg aimed to provide community members with a platform to raise their concerns and explore innovative solutions to the pressing issue of air pollution in the area. **By Thato Mangwane**.

Team DFFE Paints Comrades Green

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Athletics Team proudly painted the 2026 Comrades Marathon green as they joined approximately 21 000 runners in the 99th edition of the iconic ultra-marathon on Sunday, 14 June 2026. Flying the Department's flag high, the team demonstrated endurance, resilience and unwavering determination while representing the DFFE with pride on one of South Africa's most celebrated sporting stages. **By Madimetja Mogotlane.**

The towering dolerite rock formation known as the Valley of Desolation, an awe-inspiring sight. This geological phenomenon lies within the Camdeboo National Park in the Eastern Cape. (Image South African Tourism)

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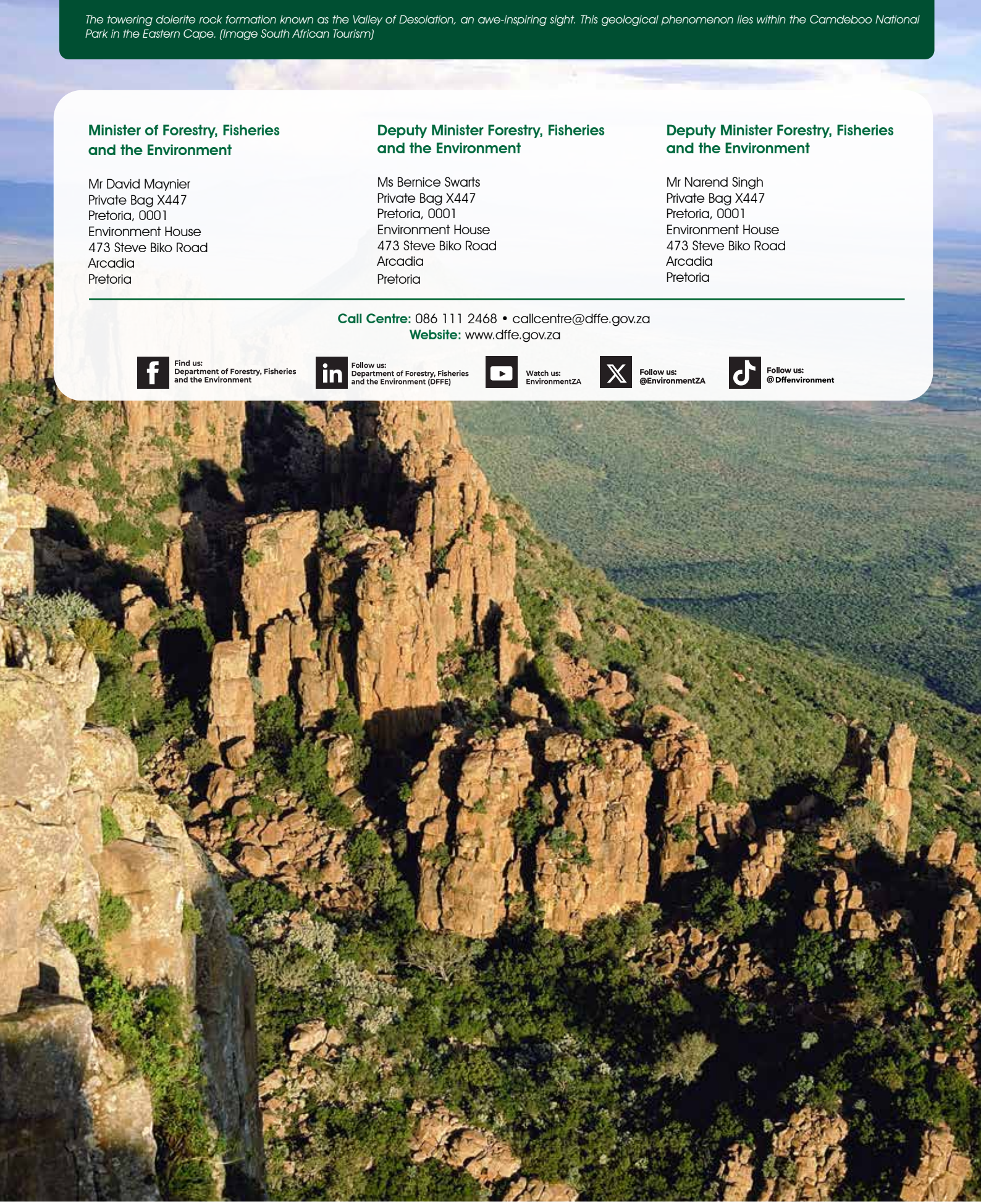

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