



**environment, forestry
& fisheries**

Department:
Environment, Forestry and Fisheries
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ref: O2/1/5/2

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 165 {NW161E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 11 of 2020

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 22 May 2020

Mr A Arnolds (Western Cape: EFF) to ask the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

What steps is her department taking to reverse the (a) destruction of our country's wetlands, (b) endangerment of our wetland ecosystems and (c) negative impact this is causing (details furnished)?

165. THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPLIES:

Below are some of interventions by the department to address the impact on wetlands:

1. Designation of the Ramsar sites in South Africa:

South Africa as a party to the Ramsar Convention carries an obligation to designate suitable wetlands for Ramsar list of wetlands of international importance and ensure their management thereof. To date, South Africa has thus far designated 26 sites as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 563,005 hectares. Management Authorities have been designated for the management, conservation and protection of these Ramsar sites.

The list of designated Ramsar sites in South Africa is attached as **Annexure A** for ease of reference. More information on Ramsar sites in South Africa, please visit

<https://www.ramsar.org/wetland/south-africa>

2. Implementation of Working for Wetland Programme

Wetlands are ecological assets/infrastructure providing nature-based solutions to some of society's challenges, such as maintaining water quality, mitigating the effects of flooding, and food security. The Department through the Environmental Programmes Branch is responsible for the implementation of the Working for Wetlands programme. This program prioritizes degraded wetlands for rehabilitation and restoration of their functionality. Interventions in this programme involve addressing the causes of wetland degradation and carrying out the rehabilitation of priority wetlands in order to improve the regulation of water flows, improve water quality and increase biodiversity.

This project commenced in the year 2000, has thus far invested over R1.3 billion in the rehabilitation of over 1,500 wetlands, and generated 37,000 jobs and 3.3 million person days (incl. 278,000 days of training). This project is being implemented in all Nine of South Africa's Provinces by a dedicated team of experts working closely with communities. Further interventions are facilitated through the Working for Water Programme as well other land care initiatives involving other state and non-state players.

3. The Implementation of Monitoring Effectiveness and Tracking Tools within the Ramsar sites

The department recently extended its web based management effectiveness tracking tool (METT) to incorporate Ramsar wetlands of international importance. This self-assessment tool assists management authorities to improve on their planning and implementation of effective interventions for the conservation and management of Ramsar sites (wetlands of International importance). The link to access METT Web Based tool: <https://mett.environment.gov.za/Account/Home.aspx>.

4. Towards the development of a joint wetlands policy

In the history of wetland management in South Africa, there has been a variety of legislation and acts that were applied in the management of wetlands. These include Mountains Catchment Areas Act 63 of 1970; Lake Areas Development Act 39 of 1975; Conservation of Agricultural Act 43 of 1983; National Water Act 36 of 1998; National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 and National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of

2004. All these legislative tools are administered by a variety of departments responsible for water, agriculture and environment/biodiversity. The management of wetlands are also guided by a number of international obligations such as the Ramsar Convention, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Convention of Biological Diversity, and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA).

Key policy developments include:

- Publication of the need for wetland policy by (DEFF) in 1999;
- Wetland position discussion paper by DALRD/ARC in 2008
- Wetland position paper by the Department of Water and SANITATION (DWS) in 2016
- Operational Wetland Policy developed in terms of National Water Act by DWS in 2017; and
- Situational analysis on wetland legislation and policy by DEFF in 2018

All these policy interventions underscored the need for an integrated wetlands policy for South Africa. Given the foregoing, DEFF in collaboration with the DWS and DALRRD and other relevant stakeholders initiated a process of developing a Wetland Management Framework for South Africa. This joint framework will provide direction for the further development and implementation of coherent instruments and interventions required to improve wetland management in South Africa.

5. Launching of compliance and enforcement intervention within Ramsar sites by DEFF

The Department has initiated a wetlands management project titled "*multi-agency compliance and enforcement intervention within the Ramsar Wetlands*". The goal of this operation is to ensure that Ramsar sites and wetlands of national importance are conserved and sustainably utilized and to prevent encroachment and loss of Ramsar sites or any of the prioritised wetlands. The list of ongoing compliance and enforcement activities around wetlands at national level is attached as **Annexure B** for ease of reference.

6. Protection of Strategic Water Sources

The Department working closely with South Africa National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and others have to pursue the protection of strategic water sources areas across the country. Strategic water source areas are regarded as a natural "water factories", that support growth

and development. The deterioration of water quality and quantity in these areas can have a disproportionately large negative effect on the functioning of downstream ecosystems and the overall sustainability of growth and development in the regions they support.

Regards



.....
MS B D CREECY, MP
MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 9/6/2020