



**forestry, fisheries
& the environment**

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 2231 {NW2535E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 22 of 2021

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Mr D W Bryant (DA) to ask the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

- (1) Whether any study on plastic pollution along the coastline of the Republic has been undertaken; if not, why not; if so, what steps are being taken to reduce the impact of plastic waste and discarded nets on the Cape fur seals along the coast of the Republic;
- (2) what is the population of the Cape fur seals along the coastline of the Republic;
- (3) whether there has been any fluctuation in the population of the seals over the past 10 years; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details?

2231. THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPLIES:

- 1) In 2019, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), through the Waste Research Development and Innovation Roadmap, undertook a project aimed at reviewing the state of South Africa's current knowledge base on marine litter. The objective of the study was to consolidate the existing scientific evidence and to assess the current gaps in knowledge. The study led to five papers published in the South African Journal of Science in May 2020, covering such topics as the sources and pathways of marine plastic litter, the transport and fate of plastic litter and its ecological impacts.

Several of the studies that have been conducted have recommended the strengthening of efforts to help reduce the leakage of plastic waste into the environment. Government aims to achieve this through a number of initiatives, some of which are summarized below.

- In September 2020, Cabinet approved the National Waste Management Strategy, 2020 (NWMS) in terms of Section 6 of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008) (NEM:WA), which updated the 2011 strategy. The Strategy strongly advocates the notion of a circular economy in which plastics are kept within the economy as far as possible through the application of waste avoidance, recovery, recycling and reuse to minimise waste generated. Unlike the 2011 strategy, the 2020 strategy places a stronger emphasis on supporting innovation and partnerships with the private sector, collaboration with other departments on the beneficiation of waste and supporting the provincial and local spheres of government to build their capacity in respect of waste management.

The implementation of the 2020 strategy is centred around three strategic pillars of action, namely waste minimisation, waste service provisioning, and compliance and enforcement. For each of these strategic pillars, specific objectives, actions and targets have been formulated and are being monitored in terms of performance indicators within the waste management sector.

- In April 2021 the Department published amendments to the Plastic Carrier Bags and Plastic Flat Bags Regulations in terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act 107 of 1998) (NEMA) and the NEM:WA. The amendments focus on promoting the circular economy and to increase the amount of recycled content or “post-consumer recyclate” material being used in the manufacturing process of plastic bags. These amendments aim to enhance the demand-side of waste management and to secure the necessary demand to drive the diversion of plastic waste from landfill.
- In November 2020 the Department published the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Regulations in Government Gazette 43879 (Notice No. 1184) on 5 November 2020 for implementation. These regulations make it compulsory for producers and importers of plastic packaging to belong to an EPR scheme. In doing so, such producers and importers must demonstrate how the environmental impacts of their products are being managed throughout the products’ life-cycle, from design to the post-consumer phase.
- The department is also supporting several other initiatives that are led by various other organisations (private and civil society) in the country, aimed at addressing plastic waste in

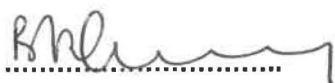
South Africa. These initiatives include, amongst others, the SA Initiative to End Plastic Waste, the National Plastics Pact and the Plastics Master Plan (led by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC)).

The steps taken to reduce the impact of discarded nets on the Cape fur seals along the coast of the Republic are as follows:

- Most fisheries sectors are required (through permit conditions) to report gear loss (including the GPS co-ordinates) to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE). Marking of fishing gear is not a requirement of fishing permits; however, all buoys and ropes are marked according to vessels, and traps are colour-coded specific to operators / vessels.
 - There are mitigation measures in place for many fisheries as well, e.g. for the gillnet, octopus trap, and rock-lobster trap fisheries. A well-established disentanglement network of government and non-government organisations exist to deal with cetacean, shark, bird, and other entanglements, mostly due to ghost gear.
 - Fishing gear may be deliberately abandoned or discarded to disguise Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) fishing activities. South Africa has acceded to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing, including conditions in relation to the marking of the fishing gear. The agreement on Port State Measures is seen to be a cost effective and potent tool to combat IUU fishing.
 - The department and stakeholders have been monitoring trends of plastic pollutants that entangle Cape fur seals at the Cape Town docks since 1990. The effort is integrated into disentanglement efforts where role players conduct daily visits to known hotspots to remove plastic items from seals. The Benguela Current Commission will be funding analysis and the write-up of these data in 2021/22.
- 2) The last comprehensive pup count was conducted in 2017. Based on these pup production estimates, there are at least 600 000 seals in South Africa.
- 3) The population is generally stable; however, scientists have noticed, through research and monitoring, that there are colony specific level fluctuations. A notable decrease was at Kleinsee (Northern Cape) where pup production declined by up to 50 000 between the years 2000 and 2017. Conversely, since 2006, there has been a rapid and exponential increase in the number of seals at Vondeling Island, south of Saldanha (which has now stabilised) and Robberg on the south

east coast. This was not a biologically plausible increase and, as such, it is suspected that it was a result of immigration from northern colonies, most likely from Kleinsee. The increase in the south and the decrease in the north is consistent with the direction of shift in distribution of their preferred prey resources (sardines and anchovy).

Regards



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

DATE: 23/9/2021