



Leaders in Environmental Management

Courtesy of www.environment.blogs.com

Page 1 of 1

New Biodiversity strategy launched

Original article on www.iol.co.za, 22 May 2008



Biodiversity policies must be integrated into economic decision-making for South Africa's flora and wildlife to be conserved, says Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk.

He said on Monday up to four-fifths of the country's biodiversity lay outside its game reserves, marine parks and other protected areas.

"Given the geographic spread and extraordinary diversity of our plant and animal species, it is impossible to conserve the majority of species and ecosystems through a traditional protected areas approach alone."

Van Schalkwyk was speaking at the launch of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) in Port Elizabeth on Monday.

He said it had now become necessary to integrate biodiversity priorities into the policies, plans and programmes of all South Africans.

According to the NBSAP, this will include "macro-economic, trade, industrial, and tax policy".

The document aims to establish a framework and plan of action for the sustainable use of the country's biodiversity.

It was compiled by the department of environmental affairs over the past three years, South Africa's biodiversity is very important to the national economy, and to people's livelihoods at a local level, says the document.

"This value is often not recognised by decision-makers, and biodiversity is not adequately considered in development planning and conversions of land from natural habitat to other use."

"This may be partly due to the historical focus on species rather than ecosystems and the services they provide, and the fact that much of the use value of species to rural people is not quantified, and is not included in economic indicators," says the document.

"Conservation of biodiversity in a network of protected areas, while important, is not enough to safeguard these important resources now and in the future. It is essential that biodiversity is mainstreamed throughout the economy."

The NBSAP says after more than a decade of democracy, South Africa has excellent national environmental policies, and a legislative framework, in place.

"(But) there is now an urgent need for implementation by provincial and local spheres of government."

Van Schalkwyk said an assessment by his department and the SA National Biodiversity Institute had revealed some alarming figures:

- of South Africa's terrestrial ecosystems, 34 percent were threatened, and five percent critically endangered;
- of the country's 120 major rivers, 82 percent were threatened and 44 percent critically endangered; and
- of 13 "groups of estuarine biodiversity", three were in critical danger, and 12 percent of marine bi-zones under serious threat.

The NBSAP would "inform the creation, in law, of a National Biodiversity Framework " for an integrated, approach to biodiversity management by organs of state, the minister said. - Sapa