



SOUTH AFRICA
YEARBOOK
2024/25

Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) is mandated to give effect to the right of citizens to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being, and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations. The department provides leadership towards sustainability in environmental management, conservation and protection for the benefit of South Africans and the global community.

The National Development Plan (NDP) sets out a vision for promoting environmental sustainability in South Africa by making an equitable transition to a low-carbon economy and transforming human settlements for improved local governance and spatial integration. Broadly, the NDP envisions environmental sustainability and transformation within the context of an integrated and inclusive economy that is supported by a capable and developmental state.

This vision is given expression by Priority 1 (Economic transformation and job creation), Priority 4 (Spatial integration, human settlements and local government) and Priority 6 (A capable, ethical and developmental state) of government's 2019 – 2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework, with which the work of the DFFE is closely aligned. Accordingly, the department's ongoing objective is to develop strategies and policies aimed at regulating and promoting the sustainable use of inland and coastal natural resources; and at reducing carbon emissions, atmospheric pollutants and the effects of climate change.

The DFFE was not spared from the government-wide cost containment measures, which resulted in budget cuts amounting to R2.5 billion over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). The economic complexities faced by our country have led to National Treasury significantly reducing the departments' budget allocation over the past years and the MTEF, with no increase expected in the coming years.

Over the medium-term, the department planned to continue focusing on supporting an equitable transition to a low-carbon economy and a climate-resilient society; creating jobs and work opportunities through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP); and creating an enabling environment for South Africa's transition to a circular economy.

Expenditure is set to increase at an average annual rate of 8.5%, from R9 billion in 2023/24 to R9.8 billion in 2025/26. An estimated 49.4% (R14.4 billion) of the department's allocation over the MTEF period is earmarked for spending on goods and services, mostly to provide funding for projects in the EPWP that are aimed at creating jobs and work opportunities. The second largest cost driver are transfers and subsidies to the department's entities, accounting for an estimated 24% (R7.1 billion) of expenditure over the period ahead.

Over the medium-term, the responsibility for enforcement at ports of entry will shift to the Border Management Authority. Accordingly, amounts of R14 million in 2023/24, R14.7 million in 2024/25 and R15 million in 2025/26 are shifted to the Department of Home Affairs.

Supporting an equitable transition to environmental stability

The department plays a pivotal role in ensuring that South Africa is equipped to manage and mitigate the effects of climate change. President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Climate Change Bill into law on 26 July 2024, which sets out a national and global climate change response, including mitigation and adaptation actions. The Act is not yet operational, and will only come into effect when the President issues a proclamation. This legislation provides a comprehensive framework for climate action across all sectors of our society and economy.

The law also sets out to enhance South Africa's ability and capacity over time to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build climate resilience while reducing the risk of job losses, and promote new job opportunities in the emerging green economy. The Act will also strengthen coordination between national sector departments and provide policy setting and decision-making to enable South Africa to meet the commitments in Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement.

Some of the key provisions of the Act include:

- Mitigation: Establishing a national greenhouse gas (GHG) emission trajectory, requiring several Ministers to develop and implement measures to address climate change

through sectoral emission targets, and mandating major emitting companies to comply with mandatory carbon budgets.

- Adaptation: Involving cooperation with provincial and local governments and communities to address climate adaptation challenges.

Creating work opportunities and jobs

Through a range of EPWP projects implemented by the department, the DFFE exceeded its 2023/24 EPWP target of 42 302 work opportunities by creating a total of 80 918 work opportunities.

The work opportunities created benefited 60% women and 58% youth, with 1% being persons with disabilities. Youth employment included the employment of graduates, enabling them to gain critical experience in line with section 24 of the Constitution. It is encouraging that some of these graduates were absorbed into the municipalities and other host organisations. Furthermore, the department met its target for full-time equivalents (FTEs), meaning that it was able to improve the duration of employment noting that EPWP participants are paid in accordance with the number of days worked.

For the 2024/25 financial year, DFFE has prioritised the creation of 31 075 EPWP work opportunities and 22 538 full-time equivalents through the implementation of the Working for Water, Working on Fire, Working for Wetlands and the Municipal Greening and Cleaning programmes.

Transitioning to a circular economy

Over the medium-term, the department will focus on creating an enabling environment to support South Africa's transition to a circular economy, which entails shifting away from the current wasteful economy to an economy that is more regenerative, inclusive and equitable. Accordingly, over the MTEF period, the department plans to review and strengthen the extended producer responsibility policy framework and regulations.

The aim of this is to ensure that priority waste streams – such as plastics, paper and packaging, lighting, and electrical and electronics – are minimised, and that a culture

of reusing and recycling is widely adopted by industry. It will also implement the national waste management strategy, which is aimed at minimising waste and diverting 30% of waste from landfills to be recycled, repurposed and reintroduced into the economy over the medium-term.

An example of the department's facilitation of this shift is in the tyre industry, for which the department has published the Section 29 Tyre Industrial Waste Management Plan for implementation in March 2024. The plan was developed in partnership with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, and includes the establishment of sustainable markets for recycled tyre products and the development of processing capacity to support the sustainable recycling of old tyres.

By providing training to municipal councillors and officials on waste management over the medium term, the department will seek to strengthen capacity and improve waste management in municipalities. This involves supporting the development of the integrated waste management plan, collection and diversion from landfills, and the implementation of clean-up campaigns and public awareness programmes such as War on Waste.

Activities related to transitioning to a circular economy are expected to result in expenditure of R2 billion over the MTEF period in the Chemicals and Waste Management programme, allocations to which increase at an average annual rate of 7%, from R634 million in 2023/24 to R678.8 million in 2025/26.

Legislation and policies

The DFFE's mandate is derived from the following legislation:

The National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act 108 of 1998), as amended by the National Environmental Management Amendment Act, 2004 (Act 8 of 2004), provides for specific legislation on biodiversity and heritage resources, oceans and coasts, climate change and air quality management, and waste and chemicals management, and streamlines the process of regulating and administering the Environmental Impact Assessment process;

- The National Environmental Management: Air Quality

Act, 2004 (Act 39 of 2004), which reforms the law regulating air quality in order to protect the environment by providing reasonable measures for preventing pollution and ecological degradation, and securing ecologically sustainable development, provides for national norms and standards that regulate the monitoring of air quality;

- The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), 2004 (Act 10 of 2004), which significantly reforms South Africa's laws regulating biodiversity;
- The National Environmental Management: Integrated Coastal Management Act, 2008 (Act 24 of 2008), which promotes the conservation of the coastal environment, and ensures sustainable development practices and the use of natural resources;
- National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act 59 of 2008), which reforms the law regulating waste management in order to protect health and the environment by providing reasonable measures for the prevention of pollution;
- National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Amendment, Act, 2009 (Act 15 of 2009), which provides for the assignment of national parks, special parks and heritage sites to South Africa in terms of the World Heritage Convention Act, 1999 (Act 49 of 1999);
- National Forests Act, 1998 (Act 84 of 1998), which promotes sustainable management and development of forests for the benefits of all; creates the conditions necessary to restructure forestry in state forests; provides special measures for the protection of certain forests and trees; promotes the sustainable use of forests for environmental, economic, educational, recreational, cultural, health and spiritual purposes; promotes community forestry; promotes greater participation in all aspects of forestry and forest products industry by person disadvantaged by unfair discrimination;
- On 1 July 2022, the National Forests Act (NFA) was amended. The President assented the Act on 26 June 2022, and subsequently published in the Government Gazette on the 01 July 2022. The Act was Proclaimed by the President on the 25 November 2024 and published for implementation in the Government Gazette on

the 4 December 2024. In addition, amendment to the Regulations under the National Forest Act, 1998 was promulgated on 6 January 2025. The Public Notice was published on 30 January 2025 in the Citizen newspaper;

- National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Act 101 of 1998), which provides for the prevention and combating of veld, forest and mountain fires across South Africa; and
- Marine Living Resources Act, 1998 (Act 8 of 1998), which deals with the long-term sustainable utilisation of marine living resources.

Forestry

The DFFE is the custodian of South Africa's forest resources, which cover over 38 million hectares (ha) – about 31.1% of the country's land surface area. Forest products contribute about R36.34 billion to the economy. Export value decreased by 5%, from R26 to R24.7 billion. This is underpinned by 1.2 million ha of well-developed plantation forestry. The forestry sector is responsible for 147 400 direct jobs.

A forest sector review conducted in preparation for the Forestry Sector Master Plan revealed that forestry products contribute at least 4.5% to the total manufacturing in the country, putting it among the top five sectors within the manufacturing industry. It also revealed that export earnings had increased almost threefold, providing a positive trade balance of up to R10 billion in less than a decade.

Much of forestry operations are rurally based, making it a significant contributor to rural economies and social wellbeing. Forestry provides livelihood support to 648 000 people in the country's rural areas. The pulp and paper industry provides about 16 000 direct and 10 000 indirect employment opportunities. Some 18 100 direct workers are employed and 6 000 indirect in sawmilling, 3 600 in the timber board, 2 000 in the mining timber industries, while a further 7 500 workers are employed in miscellaneous jobs in forestry.

Forestry is one of the sectors that have huge potential in job creation whilst ensuring the sustainable use of natural resources. Through the Plantation Forestry and the Forestry Stewardship Council, the DFFE will be able to enhance on the existing natural forests and woodlands. Of the 1.2 million

ha of plantations, some are leased by government to private companies, and 3.7% of these are owned by small growers. There are three categories of forests in South Africa, namely indigenous forests, woodlands and plantation forests. Natural forests cover approximately half a million ha of land in total, plantation forestry covers about 1.2 million ha and the woodlands collectively cover between 36 and 38 million ha, depending on the classification used.

Forestry activities in indigenous forests and woodlands are not limited to the protection of the resource as a natural heritage, but include its development, use and management, as well as the management and processing of non-timber forest products. Plantation forestry practices include, among other things, the establishment of vast areas of land with exotic tree species that are harvested and processed into pulp for the paper and packaging industries; sawn timber to produce structural and industrial timber used in the construction industry; poles for telephone and electricity supply; mining timber for use as underground support structures in primarily the gold and platinum mining sectors. The balance of other timber produced is used for a variety of other products, such as charcoal and match manufacture.

Although large forestry companies do not own all the certified forests, having their own specialist environmental departments has helped the rapid expansion of certification, as they ensure that land is managed according to their own stringent environmental codes of practice. To promote transparency, members of the public are invited to join company staff when regular audits are conducted. There has been an increase in the number of non-corporate growers who have become certified. This may be attributed to factors such as the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) acceptance of group certification schemes and the availability of local FSC auditors, both of which have reduced the cost of certification considerably. The introduction of small, low-intensity managed forest audits enables small and community forestry schemes to be FSC-certified.

To date, 27 plantations covering approximately 6 213 ha have been transferred to communities through the Community Forestry Agreement Model. To reduce Temporary Unplanted areas in State plantations, the department planted

1 848.56 ha in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and in the Eastern Cape during the 2023/24 financial year. In addition to this, 7 049.43 ha has been tendered through different silvicultural regimes like weeding, pruning and thinning.

A significant legislative milestone was achieved with the President's signing of the National Veld and Forest Fire Amendment Act into law. The amendment strengthens provisions for the formation and functioning of Fire Protection Associations, which play a critical role in the effective management of veld and forest fires.

The DFFE is the custodian of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Act No. 101 of 1998) (NVFFA), henceforth referred to as the Act. The main purpose of this Act is to prevent and combat veld, forest and mountain fires throughout the Republic. A significant legislative milestone included the President's signing of the amended National Veld and Forest Fire Bill into law in the year 2023.

In terms of Chapter 2, section 4, the act states that "any group of landowners who wish to co-operate, to predict, prevent, manage and extinguish veldfires may form a Fire Protection Association (FPA) to perform duties and functions as described in section 5(1) of the NVFFA. FPAs are important institutions that play a vital role in ensuring the implementation of Integrated Fire Management (IFM), thereby keeping veldfire risks and vulnerabilities at an acceptable level. By 2024 South Africa had 208 registered FPAs and 9 Provincial FPAs.

The department signed a contract with the service provider on 30 December 2022, to assist with planning, executing, controlling, and managing the Working on Fire (WoF) Programme, for a period of five (5) years, commencing on 6 January 2023 and terminating on 5 January 2028. Through the Working on Fire Programme, the Minister supports FPAs as per the NVFFA. Additionally, the department provide support for aerial firefighting for communities and DFFE plantations fires. This programme provided an important opportunity to advance the understanding of the risk of veld fire that can cause disasters, and has negative impacts on the socio-economic and environmental impacts.

In order to assess the functionality of the FPAs, the department had developed a questionnaire-guiding

template tool to assess the whether FPAs were functional or non-functional. During financial year 2023/24, DFFE assessed 40 FPAs. All FPAs are expected to submit their annual reports by the end of June of each year. By 2024, 179 FPAs submitted their annual reports which makes more 86% annual reports expected.

The department continues to raise public awareness about wildland fires and the impact of climate change, for example, the frequency and intensity of fires. Mitigation and reduction measures on uncontrolled veldfires in South Africa has been a collaborative effort by DFFE in conjunction with WoF by providing various workshops and training to multisectoral stakeholders which include amongst others FPAs, Law Enforcement Agencies, Institutions of Higher Learning and rural communities.

National symposium and international conferences

In 2024, DFFE had a collaborative 14th Fire Management Symposium in Howick, KwaZulu-Natal, with the Forestry Programme of the Nelson Mandela University (NMU). The Symposium aimed to integrate the efforts of natural resource managers, engineers, fire managers, educators/trainers and scientists. Through an integrated approach, different role-players were sensitised about each other's realities, successes and failures. Understanding the needs and gaps within organisations involved in wildfire management opened new avenues that will support the fire management efforts.

The DFFE was also represented at the two international conferences held in 2023 in Portugal and 2024 in Australia. DFFE under the Forestry Management Branch was represented at the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference (IWFC) under the theme "Governance Principles: Towards an International Framework" which took place in Porto, Portugal, between 16 and 19 May 2023. The conference discussed governance principles and guidelines, necessary to further develop institutional arrangements and public policies to address the consequences of environmental and socio-economic changes and climate change on fire regimes, systemic wildfire risk and fire management in

the natural and cultural and urban-industrial landscapes at global scale.

In 2024, the 7th International Fire Behaviour and Fuels Conference under the theme: “Fuel, Fire and Smoke: Evolving to Meet Our Climate Challenge.” The conference offered a forum where past Fire Management experience and lessons learned were documented, showcased current work and emerging research, and shared innovation and techniques on fire management towards developing integrated solutions to these challenges.

Indigenous forests

Only about 0,5% of South Africa’s total land area is covered by natural forests. About half of the more than 1 700 indigenous tree and shrub species, representing some 530 000 ha of dense growth, grow along the south and east coasts and on the southern and south-eastern slopes of inland mountains. The other half is spread over the interior plateaux in isolated valleys and ravines. A number of these natural forest regions, such as the Tsitsikamma National Park, are important tourist attractions. The large Afrotemperate forests of the southern Cape, although distributed close to the coast, are aligned with the inland forest types of the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo. This is because the southerly temperate latitudes compensate for the altitude of inland forests.

Almost half of all natural forests in South Africa are found on private property or land under communal tenure. A detailed inventory of natural forests helps government to monitor changes in forest areas. Although the country’s low natural forest coverage has led to the development of the commercial forestry sector over the past century, natural forests have continued playing a major role in the livelihoods and well-being of many rural communities. The use of natural forests as sources of building material, fuel wood, food and medicine is increasing, with an estimated 80% of South Africa’s population still using medicinal plants, most of which are sourced from natural forests.

The forest-type classification for natural forests represents 24 broad forest types. The Natural Forests Protected Areas System guides the setting aside and demarcation of natural

forests as protected areas. Systematic timber harvesting occurs in certain areas of southern Cape forests and on a smaller scale, in the Amathole forests in the Eastern Cape. This sustainable harvesting system concentrates on the removal of small quantities of senile trees dying off within the forest.

On average, 3 750 cubic metres (m³) of round logs are harvested annually (150m³ of stinkwood, 750m³ of yellowwood, 2 500 m³ of Australian blackwood and 350m³ of other species). The seven-week fern (*Rumohra adiantiformis*), harvested in the Knysna and Tsitsikamma forests, is another valuable product of indigenous forests. The South African market for this fern is considerable and reaches its peak in September, when sales have been known to exceed 420 000 bunches.

Woodlands

The woodlands, also known as savannahs, constitute a forest resource of major importance in South Africa. It is the most accessible forest resource for poor communities and contributes in the region of R2 000 to R5 000 to poor households annually. Natural forests cover less than one million ha of land in total, plantation forestry covers less than 1.3 million ha and the woodlands collectively cover between 29 million and 46 million ha.

The cover includes extensive areas in the low-lying, drier areas of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga. Rich biodiversity is found in savannah woodland comprising 5 900 plants, 540 bird species and 175 mammals. These include iconic species such as the Big Five group of mammals that are important to the tourism industry. Several protected tree species of the savannah, such as camel thorn and leadwood, contribute substantially to the lucrative braai wood market, and guidelines have been set for licensing processes to assist with the control of their use.

Kathu Forest in the Northern Cape is the first woodland area to be declared protected woodland under the National Forests Act of 1998. In the past, this resource was not really recognised as a forestry responsibility, except where woodland occurred on state-forest land in conservation areas. However, the National Forestry Action Programme

of 1997 identified woodland management as a key area of operation for forestry. The National Forests Act of 1998 also includes woodland in its definition of forests and mandates monitoring and reporting on the state of the woodlands.

This legislation protects woodlands on private and communal land, as well as in state forests, while promoting sustainable use. Savannah woodlands are the most extensive vegetation type in southern Africa and dominate Africa as a whole. Globally, woodlands cover between an eighth and a sixth of the Earth’s land surface. The woodlands are a valuable source of fuel, building material, craft timber and a variety of non-timber products. These include fruit, fodder, medicinal compounds, honey, meat and mushrooms. They form the backbone of the livelihoods of millions of people. The annual marula fruit (*Sclerocarya birrea*) harvest, for example, is worth some R1.1 billion a year to rural communities.

There are 87 savannah woodland types, and although the biome is fairly well protected in formal and private reserves, many under protected savannah types have been identified. Another woodland type is the Albany Thicket Biome, characterised by dense growth of woody and succulent plant species. There are 13 thicket types, which together cover about three million ha.

Protected tree species

In accordance with the National Forests Act of 1998 (Act No. 84 of 1998), as amended, a substantial update on the protection of tree species has recently been enacted. The latest declaration, which was gazetted on 13 March 2024, identifies 51 tree species deemed protected under Section 12 of the Act. Section 15 of the NFAA was amended as follows: “The Minister must, by notice in the Gazette and in two newspapers circulating nationally publish—”; and (b) by the substitution in subsection (3) for paragraph (b) of the following paragraph: “(b) an appropriate warning of the prohibition referred to in subsection (1) and the consequences of an infringement at least every five years or publish a change that has been effected to the list contemplated in paragraph (a) in the Gazette and in two newspapers circulating nationally.”

Commercial forests

Commercial forest plantations predominantly meet South Africa's demand for wood. During the 1930s, the country started extensive commercial plantations to make South Africa self-sufficient in its timber requirements, and to provide more job opportunities. Commercial plantations of exotic species proved to be a sound investment, and the private sector established large plantations of pine, eucalyptus and wattle. South Africa's plantation forests cover about 1% of the combined cultivated (arable) and grazing land.

The commercial forestry industry in South Africa is committed to practising sustainable forest management and is a world leader in forest certification. Stringent environmental codes of practice are implemented in all plantation and processing activities. The Institute for Commercial Forestry Research completed its role in developing the National Forest Protection Strategy for the department, a project funded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Another development which will assist in enhancing forest protection is the memorandum of understanding, formalising Forestry South Africa's support and funding for these activities at the Forestry and Agriculture Biotechnical Institute, which has been entered into with the University of Pretoria.

South Africa's intensively managed commercial forestry plantations are recognised as some of the most productive in the world. Consequently, from a limited geographic footprint of 1.2 million ha, the industry can produce, on a sustainable and annual basis, between 15 and 18 million t of timber a year.

Community forestry

Community forestry is designed and applied to meet the local social household and environmental needs to benefit local economic development. Community forestry is implemented by communities or with the participation of communities; and includes tree-centred projects in urban and rural areas, woodlots and woodland being managed by communities and individuals. Community forestry has gained impetus through more focused core functions, particularly in urban greening and forest enterprise development.

Participatory forest management of the DFFE is an integrated approach that contributes to achieving the sustainable management of South African forests. Elements of participatory forest management were initially developed for indigenous state forests. However, the aim is to use participatory forest management as an approach to managing all forest types, where feasible (indigenous forests, plantations, woodlots and woodlands) and where different types of ownership and management (state, provincial, communal, private and community) exist.

Forestry Master Plan

The Forestry Sector Masterplan, approved by Cabinet in 2020, is now in its fifth and final year of implementation and continues to be a flagship vehicle for inclusive growth, transformation and job creation in the forestry sector. To date, the sector has attracted over R33.2 billion in private investment, reflecting strong confidence in the Masterplan's direction and potential.

Significant progress has been made in transforming the sector, including the transfer of 27 state-managed plantations covering more than 6 200 ha to communities in the Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and KwaZulu-Natal under Community Forestry Agreements. These transfers empower communities to participate directly in forestry value chains, in line with government's policy shift from direct management to a policy, development, and regulatory role. If coupled with an accelerated and effective land reform programme, the Masterplan could enable up to 50% black and community ownership of plantation land. With a target of creating over 100 000 additional jobs, particularly through new afforestation projects, the Masterplan is proving to be a powerful driver of inclusive growth and transformation in the forestry sector.

National Arbor Month

National Arbor Month is a national campaign aimed to celebrate South Africa's trees and to raise awareness about their importance. The theme for Arbor Month 2024 is "Celebrating 30 Years of Freedom: Promoting environmental conservation and sustainable forest management."



The 2024 theme also aims to highlight key areas of forestry and tree planting in terms of their role in creating heritage wealth and sustaining healthy and resilient communities, through health benefits that are derived in forests including nutritious foods, medicine and rituals, fresh air, clean water and a place for recreation. One of the most important roles of forests is mitigation of climate change.

Freedom Park is the custodian of South Africa's cultural and historic information. It has a wide variety of South African woodland tree species and because of its location and infrastructure it has become a home of many cultural events. The infrastructure builds together with the cultural and historical essence that Freedom Park symbolises makes it most suitable venue to host the Launch of the 2024 Arbor Month Campaign.

The history of the Arbor Month Campaign

The Arbor Month Campaign has its origins from the motivational force behind the work of John Sterling Morton of Nebraska in the United States of America, who proposed in 1872 that a public holiday called Arbor Day be celebrated

by the State of Nebraska. In 1874, Arbor Day was celebrated for the first time in the United States of America, and officially adopted by South Africa in 1983 when the first celebration of the day took place. The importance of trees in our country has seen the campaign grow to where it is now where we celebrate the Arbor Month.

September is also Heritage Month. As we celebrate Arbor Month, we would like to highlight our champion trees which include some of the oldest, largest, and culturally significant trees.

The oldest tree in South Africa is the Sagole Baobab, also known as “Big tree”, located in Limpopo, Musina Local Municipality. Carbon dating has assisted to determine the age of the tree to around 1 200-year-old. This is the largest of all recorded five baobabs listed on the champion tree list in the country and is the largest indigenous tree in South Africa. It has the second thickest trunk in the world (a Mexican Cypress called the Tule Tree in Mexico holds the record). The tallest tree in South Africa is the Sydney Blue Gums (*Eucalyptus saligna*) known as “Magoebaskloof giant”

National Greening Forum

The department, working with key greening stakeholders, has established the National Greening Forum. The objective is to provide a platform where stakeholders can plan and account for greening interventions towards the achievement of the Ten Million Trees Programme. The forum meetings are attended by Municipalities and other greening stakeholders. I know for a fact that the number of trees reported are far less than what was actually planted. I therefore intend to participate in one of the forum meetings to find ways on how the reporting can be improved. The department has finalised the e-tool system which will be used to monitor and account for the trees planted.

National Arbor City Awards

Despite our efforts in the past few years, our township and rural areas have not enjoyed the benefits of tree planting. In 2002, the department introduced the National Arbor City Awards which were formed as a partnership initiative between the Department, TotalEnergies, the Institute for

Environment and Recreation Management (IERM), the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), with a purpose to encourage Municipalities to green their areas of jurisdiction.

Socio-economic reform and growth

The forestry vision states that forests are managed for people and that there is a need to create an enabling environment for economic and social development through sustainable forestry, especially at local level. Strategies to achieve this vision include forestry enterprise development, aimed at creating opportunities for people to use forests, including indigenous forests, woodlands and plantations, and forest-based resources for economic growth, income-generation and job creation.

The forestry enterprise development concept is central to government’s pro-poor agenda and is a key component of broad-based black economic empowerment in the forestry sector.

World Soil Day

World Soil Day (WSD) is observed and celebrated every year on 5 December by all UN member states, organisations of the UN system and other international and regional organisations, civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and individuals to emphasise the importance of soil.

The 2023 theme for WSD was “Soil and Water: A Source of Life”. WSD 2023 and its campaign aimed to raise awareness of the importance and relationship between soil and water in achieving sustainable and resilient agrifood systems. WSD is a unique global platform that not only celebrates soils but also empowers and engages citizens around the world to improve soil health.

The planet’s survival depends on the precious link between soil and water. More than 95% of food originates from these two fundamental resources. Soil water, vital for nutrient absorption by plants, binds our ecosystems together. This symbiotic relationship is the foundation of agricultural systems.

Role players

National Forest Advisory Council

The function of the National Forest Advisory Council (NFAC) is to advise the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment on matters related to forestry in South Africa. The Council has two permanent committees – the Committee for Sustainable Forests Management (CSFM) and the Committee on Forest Access (CFA). The CSFM’s role includes advising the:

- NFAC, the DFFE and the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment on all aspects of sustainable forest management in the country;
- DFFE and the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment on the administration of criteria, indicators and standards for sustainable forest management; and
- DFFE on convening forum for interested persons to participate in the formulation of criteria, indicators and standards.

The CFA advises the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment on promoting the granting and exercise of access to forests; promoting education on the sustainable management and use of forests, and the use of the National Forest Recreation and Access Trust funds.

South African Forestry Company Limited

The South African Forestry Company Limited (SAFCOL) conducts timber harvesting, processing and related activities, both domestically and internationally. It subscribes to the Forest Sector Charter and plays a leading role in transformation within the industry. With the focus on communities adjacent to its plantations and specifically the youth in those communities, it makes a difference in the physical circumstances and networking in communities.

The structured approach of community partnerships was strengthened, with the focus on implementing needs-driven development and making a positive impact in community members’ lives. Of special note was the launch of the SAFCOL-sponsored Forestry Chair at the University of Pretoria, which creates an opportunity for students who wish to further their studies in forestry-related fields.

Forestry South Africa (FSA)

The organisation was formed in 2002 through the amalgamation of the erstwhile Forestry Owners Association and the South African Timber Growers Association. It represents the interests of its members and the promotion and well-being of the South African commercial forestry industry. Although voluntary in its nature, FSA's membership includes all 13 corporate timber companies and their subsidiaries, operating in South Africa, 1 100 commercial timber farmers and over 20 000 small-scale black timber growers.

This membership represents over 98% of the industry as a whole and virtually all the private sector companies involved in the industry. Due to this representivity, the organisation is viewed by both government and the private sector as the body which represents the South African forestry industry. FSA is involved in a host of areas such as research, education and training, water and environmental affairs, forest protection, bioenergy, business development and transport and are represented on a number of national forums and structures.

Food and Trees for Africa (FTFA)

The FTFA is the sub-Saharan African partner of Global Relief, an international greening organisation. The FTFA's mission is to contribute to healthier living, especially in disadvantaged communities, through environmental awareness and greening programmes. It also addresses sustainable development through greening, climate change action, sustainable natural resource management and food security programmes.

The FTFA works in partnership with government, the private and public sectors and civil society. Its goal is to provide trees to as many underserved communities as possible, with the help of sponsors and certificate programmes. It manages the Urban Greening Fund in conjunction with the Department of Water and Sanitation, Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment; and the Institute of Environment and Recreation Management.

The fund supports partnerships aimed at sustainable development through tree planting, parks, food gardening

projects and environmental education. Organisations, companies and individuals can contribute to the fund to help disadvantaged South Africans create a greener, healthier and more secure life.

Research and training

South Africa has world-class forestry research infrastructure and personnel, with almost 2% of the forestry industry's turnover (private and public sectors) devoted to research. The forest research function within the DFFE has been co-ordinating a number of research projects focusing on sustainable management of forest resources. These include the monitoring and evaluation of bark-harvesting techniques used for two indigenous tree species in Letaba, the forest sustainable harvesting of plants used for medicinal purposes, the sustainable use of monkey rope (Secamone



alpini) by local subsistence farmers both ex situ and in situ, conservation of the critically endangered *Protea roupelliae* subsp. *Hamiltonii*, and conservation of the co-occurring endangered *Leucospermum gerrardii* within the Dr Hamilton Nature Reserve.

Major institutes servicing the research needs of the industry are the Institute of Commercial Forestry Research in Pietermaritzburg, the Forestry and Agriculture Biotechnology Institute and the CSIR in Pretoria. SANBI also plays an important role in terms of species protection. The faculties of agricultural and forestry sciences at the universities of Stellenbosch, KwaZulu-Natal and Venda offer forestry degrees.

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (George Saaeveld Campus) offers diplomas and limited degree courses in forestry disciplines. The Durban University of Technology offers a diploma in Pulp and Paper Technology, and the Fort Cox College of Agriculture and Forestry offers a diploma in Social Forestry. Skills training is provided by a number of industry-sponsored and in-house training centres.

The Fibre Processing and Manufacturing (FPM) Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) is responsible for ensuring that the training undertaken by the industry meets certain quality standards. The DFFE, together with the FPM SETA, offers study bursaries in forestry-related fields.

Fisheries

The South African fishing sector remains a significant contributor to food security and the economy. Stabilising the sub-sector through the allocation of longer-term fishing rights is critical to attracting investment into the industry. The fisheries sector is worth around R8 billion a year, and the commercial sector directly employs approximately 28 000 people with many thousands more depending on fisheries resources to meet basic needs in the small-scale and recreational sectors.

The South African coastline covers more than 3 000km, linking the east and west coasts of Africa. These shores are particularly rich in biodiversity, with some 10 000 species of marine plants and animals recorded. South Africa is among the global fishing nations that have identified the challenges

within their fishing industry. With 22 commercial fisheries sectors and new fisheries being explored and experimented with, South Africa has two fisheries sector components: wild capture fisheries include three distinct components, namely commercial, recreational and subsistence fisheries, each of which requires specific research and management interventions. The aquaculture (fish farming) sector is considered underdeveloped and, as a result, has been prioritised, owing to declining wild stocks.

The productive waters of the West Coast support a variety of commercially exploited marine life, including hake, anchovy, sardine, horse mackerel, tuna, snoek, rock lobster and abalone. On the East Coast, squid, linefish and a wide range of intertidal resources provide an important source of food and livelihood for coastal communities. Marine life that is not harvested, such as whales, dolphins and seabirds, is increasingly recognised as a valuable resource for nature-based tourism.

The main challenge in fisheries is to create a balance between maximising the social and economic potential of the fisheries industry, protecting the integrity and quality of the country's marine and coastal ecosystems, and addressing transformation in the sector. In line with international trends, the DFFE recognises fisheries as an economic activity rather than a purely environmental or biodiversity matter. Government has expanded the mandate for fisheries management by adding fresh water and inland fisheries, as well as aquaculture, to the department's existing responsibilities.

The fisheries sector contributes roughly 0,1% to the GDP. It is more important for economic development in the Western Cape, where 11 of the 13 proclaimed fishing harbours are situated. These contribute more than 5% to provincial GDP. The total output is estimated at 600 000 tons worth about R6 billion, depending on the pelagic catch of pilchards and anchovy, which could be as much as 600 000 tons.

It is estimated that direct employment in the industry constitutes approximately 27 000 jobs (16 000 in the primary sector and 11 000 in the secondary and tertiary sectors), while an additional 81 000 people are indirectly (net building

and bait preparing, among others) employed in industries that are at least partially dependent on the fishing sector (figures based on industry estimates and the total allowable catch and total allowable effort, calculated as a function of tonnage).

Fisheries output is determined by catch volumes, which, in turn, depend on the health and management of fish stocks, varying according to ecological changes and subject to overexploitation through illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities. The DFFE seeks to prevent overexploitation by means of assigning total allowable catch and total allowable effort per species, which are adjusted regularly depending on the estimated state of the resource.

The department has also sought to promote transformation in the sector through the inclusion of small-scale fishing communities. The Marine Living Resources Amendment Act, 2014 (Act 5 of 2014), grants small-scale fishing communities' better access to fishing rights and resources. The small-scale fishing sector is designed to address food security needs within the local community and allow fishers to derive maximum benefit through value-adding of products and accessing markets.

The effective management of the existing harbours and the proclamation of additional new harbours support resource management. Although wild catch fisheries appear unlikely to expand beyond their present levels, aquaculture is becoming more important as a substitute for wild capture fisheries. Securing sustainable markets for aquaculture products remains of crucial importance at this time, when Asian markets have been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic and South African producers face competition from cheap imports.

Securing the safety of domestic fish stocks is a central requirement for a sustainable fishing industry. High-quality scientific information to inform management decisions is the cornerstone of sound fisheries management. Under tight resource constraints, the DFFE plans to rebuild this capacity in partnership with other branches, the industry and tertiary institutions. Under the auspices of Phakisa Initiative 5, the DFFE, together with other law enforcement authorities, focused on preventing illegal harvesting of marine resources.

To ensure more permanent deployment of security personnel, the department planned to undertake a marine and coastal sectoral threat, risk and opportunity analysis to inform where the country should focus on at a strategic and operational level. South Africa has acceded to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission and the Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, thereby allowing the country greater influence in negotiating for increased tuna quota allocations and access.

The Working for Fisheries Programme has supported eight significant, job-generating projects, and anti-poaching measures continue to be a priority for the Fisheries Management branch and the Marine Living Resources Fund (MLRF) to ensure the sustainable management of South Africa's marine resources.

Small-scale fisheries sector

The Small-scale Fisheries Policy seeks to address imbalances of the past and ensure that small-scale fishers are accommodated and properly managed. For the first time, fishing rights can be allocated on a group, rather than an individual, basis. The policy further aims to support investment in community entities to take joint responsibility for sustainably managing fisheries resources and to address the depletion of critical fisheries stocks.

The sector is aimed at redressing the inequality suffered by coastal fishing communities which, as a result of unintended consequences, have remained marginalised through previous rights allocation systems. Furthermore, the establishment of the small-scale sector seeks to empower small-scale fishers to contribute meaningfully to the national GDP and to play a meaningful role in food security and job creation.

This process is informed by the Marine Living Resources Act of 1998, and the regulations thereof, which were amended to legally recognise small-scale fishers who have been living in coastal communities and depending on fishing and its related activities as a source of livelihood. The small-scale fisheries regulations, along with the Marine Living Resources Amendment Act of 2014, provide the legal mechanism for the implementation of the small-scale

fisheries policy. These reforms give legal recognition to small-scale fishers and will promote the transformation of the subsector to assist fishing communities living along the coastal areas in creating sustainable livelihoods, generating income and creating jobs.

Central to the success of small fishing co-operatives is an increase in the basket of species available to them. In 2021, the DFFE published, for public comment, an apportionment split for the squid, linefish and abalone sectors to enhance the high value species available for allocation to the small-scale sector. The DFFE received and finalised 1 213 appeals against the decisions taken by the Delegated Authority in the Fishing Rights Allocation Process (FRAP) across nine sectors.

The allocation of small-scale fishing rights in the Western Cape has been finalised, and all 62 recognised small-scale fisheries co-operatives with a total membership of

3 850 declared fishers were granted 15-year fishing rights. The finalisation was a milestone as it marked the final province where these rights have been granted for the first time in South Africa's history.

The department remains committed to ensuring compliance with international fisheries obligations, which aim to promote the sustainable management of fisheries and marine resources and, most importantly, preserve our rich marine biodiversity.

Recreational fishing

While the illegal harvesting of abalone poses the greatest threat to management objectives, the DFFE will continue to work with all stakeholders in the abalone sector and continue to strengthen partnerships with other law enforcement agencies and communities to ensure that the country grows and protects its resources. South Africa's extensive coastline, spanning two oceans, and its numerous dams, lakes, rivers and streams, make the country a recreational fisher's paradise. However, recreational fishing may only be undertaken with a valid permit and is limited to certain times of the fishing season.

To reduce user conflicts between commercial and recreational fishing and to protect stocks during breeding

periods, certain areas have been declared closed to fishing. Recreational fishers are also subject to bag limits of fish on a per-day basis. Annual recreational fishing licences in all industries total about 300 000, with income generated from these licences amounting to R18 million. The actual annual catch is about 17 000 tons of high-value species.

World Fisheries Day

South Africa celebrates World Fisheries Day on 21 November, alongside fishing communities throughout the world. World Fisheries Day helps to highlight the critical importance of water to human lives and the lives it sustains, both in and out of water. Water forms a continuum, whether contained in rivers, lakes or the ocean.

A United Nations study reported that more than two-thirds of the world's fisheries have been overfished or are fully harvested and more than one-third are in a state of decline because of factors such as the loss of essential fish habitats, pollution, and global warming. Fish form an important part of the diets of people around the world, particularly those who live near rivers, coasts and other water bodies.

A number of traditional societies and communities are rallied around the occupation of fishing, hence a majority of human settlements, whether small villages or mega cities, are situated in close proximity to water bodies. Beyond the importance of water for survival and as a means of transportation, it is also an important source of fish and aquatic protein. However, this proximity has also led to severe ocean and coastal pollution from run-off and from domestic and industrial activities carried out nearby. This has led to depletion of fish stocks in the immediate vicinity, requiring fishermen to fish farther and farther away from their traditional grounds.

Furthermore, overfishing and mechanisation have also resulted in a crisis – fish stocks are being depleted through “factory” vessels, bottom trawling, and other means of unsustainable fishing methods. Unless we address these issues collectively, the crisis will deepen. World Fisheries Day helps to highlight these complexities and move towards finding solutions to the increasingly inter-connected problems we are facing, and in the longer term, to sustainable means of maintaining fish stocks.

Facts on fisheries:

- Small-scale fisheries (marine and inland) employ about 90% of those involved in fisheries.
- 65% of the reported catch from inland fisheries is from low-income food-deficit countries.
- Estimates vary, but from around 30 million to over 60 million people in the developing world are involved in inland fisheries and about 50% are thought to be women.
- More than 25% of the world's dietary protein is provided by fish.
- The human population consumes over 100 million t of fish annually.
- More than 200 million of Africa's 1 billion people regularly consume fish and nearly half of this comes from inland fisheries.

National Environmental Impact Assessment and Management Strategy

The strategy consists of voluntary and regulated instruments where:

- Regulated environmental impact assessments are used only when it is the most appropriate tool;
- Environmental impact assessment and management occur within the strategic context of environmentally informed spatial instruments, sector strategies and policies;
- Authorities have enough capacity with skilled and experienced officials; other stakeholders have the capacity and skills to ensure maximum impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategy; government regulatory processes have been integrated and aligned; and government, environmental assessment practitioners, developers and the community are equally committed to making it work.

4x4 regulations

The Strategy Towards Co-regulation of the Off-road Sector in South Africa is aimed at minimising the impact of off-road driving on the environment, by giving direction to off-road users and owners to develop and use inland routes in sensitive areas responsibly. The strategy applies to the inland recreational use of off-road vehicles, including two-

wheel, three-wheel and four-wheel vehicles, which include 2x4 and 4x4 motor vehicles, quad bikes and motorbikes.

A key outcome of the strategy was the development, drafting and implementation of national norms and/or standards, with a supportive enabling legislative framework, to facilitate environmental compliance, responsible tourism and the long-term sustainability of the off-road industry.

The banning of off-road vehicles in coastal zones has enabled several shore-breeding birds, especially the Damara Tern and the African Black Oystercatcher, to breed successfully on beaches again. The number of loggerhead and leatherback turtles hatching successfully on KwaZulu-Natal's northern beaches has also increased since the ban was enforced.

Coastal management

The ocean covers three-quarters of the Earth, highlighting the importance of its protection. The DFFE recognises the challenges regarding the management of ocean spaces in South Africa's adjacent ocean areas. Of the 200 estuaries found along the South African coast, 25% are in a degraded state. This is due to inappropriate developments along the banks of estuaries and in their catchment areas.

The department is proactively its attention proactively on these degraded systems and prioritising the development of management plans to improve the functioning of estuaries and associated hinterlands. The Buoy Oceans Monitoring System, which provides information on the state of the oceans at Storms River in the Tsitsikamma National Park, is the first in a series of observation and monitoring platforms, which will form the basis of the South African National Oceans and Coastal Monitoring System.

The DFFE reviewed the Recreational Water Quality Guidelines for Coastal Waters to develop effective early warning systems to pre-empt the catastrophic impacts of possible hazards.

Environment Nature positive future

Throughout the world, countries and formations as diverse as the European Union, India, Canada, Rwanda, Gabon,

China and Japan are recognising that what the World Economic Forum terms a "nature positive future", can unlock enormous potential and investment opportunities for both developed and developing countries. A nature positive future can enable economies to recover and grow, successfully service their national debts and carry out their governmental responsibilities to citizens. This can be done in a way that sustains both the natural environment, human health and wellbeing.

For South Africa, embracing a nature positive future as part of the overall economic recovery would have the following advantages – a positive impact on job creation in new industries, which offer potential for the creation of new enterprises using new technologies; dedicated international "green funds", which offer an investment source for these new industries; green bonds, which have been shown to be cheaper than traditional vanilla bonds; and investment in green and sustainable solutions, which offers the country opportunities to promote long-term economic competitiveness and climate resilience.

International environment days

South Africa has adopted the entire month of June to heighten awareness of environmental issues through various pertinent activities. It is during June that the country celebrates World Environment Day, World Oceans Day and World Day to Combat Desertification.

World Environment Day

World Environment Day is the biggest, most globally celebrated day for positive environmental action. Every year, participants organise clean-up campaigns, art exhibits, tree-planting drives, concerts, dance recitals, recycling drives, social media campaigns and different contests themed around caring for the planet. World Environment Day is the UN's principal vehicle for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the environment.

Over the years, it has grown to be a broad, global platform for public outreach that is widely celebrated by stakeholders in over 100 countries. It also serves as the 'people's day' for doing something positive for the environment, galvanising

individual actions into a collective power that generates an exponentially positive impact on the planet.

The day is marked annually on 5 June as per the declaration of the UN in 1972. Each World Environment Day is organised around a theme that focuses attention on a particularly pressing environmental concern. The theme for World Environment Day 2023 was "#BeatPlasticPollution", which highlighted the need to take concrete action to achieve transformative change to tackle the climate crisis.

Minister Barbara Creecy led the World Environment Day Beach Clean-Up in partnership with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) on 5 June 2023 in Cape Town, Western Cape. A Beach Clean-up at Macassar Resort Beach was a community activity campaign in taking responsibility to take care of the environment. World Environment Day is the UN's most important day for encouraging worldwide awareness and action for the protection of our environment. Through Environment Month, the youth are encouraged to get closer to nature and harness the promise it holds as they commit to building a climate-resilient and healthier world for tomorrow. World Environment Day (WED) is the biggest, most globally celebrated day for positive environmental action. Through WED, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) flagship programme enables everyone to realise their responsibility to care for the Earth and reminds individuals and everyone of their power to become agents of change.

The commemoration of 2023 World Environment Day and Youth Month was hosted by the Deputy Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Makhotso Sotyu, at Mmamethlake Village, Mpumalanga, on 13 June 2024. Deputy Minister Sotyu, on behalf of the department, donated school supplies to Dipere Primary School, Mamoka Secondary School, Mmamatli Combined School, Tabane Primary School and Mmamethlake Primary School in the Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality, Mpumalanga, as part of the department's Youth Month activities. World Environment Day raises awareness of environmental issues such as marine pollution, overpopulation, global warming, sustainable development and wildlife crime. This year's campaign was celebrated under the theme #BeatPlasticPollution.

It highlights the need to take concrete action to achieve transformative change to tackle the climate crisis. The human mobility implications of the climate and environmental crisis are profound.

World Oceans Day

World Oceans Day is aimed at appreciating, protecting, restoring and honouring ecosystem services and resources provided by oceans. The international theme for World Oceans Day 2021 was “The Ocean: Life and Livelihoods”. The theme shed light on the wonder of the ocean and how it is a life source – supporting humanity and every other organism on Earth.

World Oceans Day 2023 was celebrated and hosted by Minister Barbara Creecy on 8 June 2023 in Cape Town on the SA Agulhas II during the vessel's Open Day in the Western Cape. The SA Agulhas II is South Africa's state-of-the-art polar research and supply vessel. It plays a crucial role in supporting the country's involvement in Antarctica and the sub-Antarctic Islands, and in researching national interests in the Southern Ocean. Moreover, the Open Day offered a dynamic, hands-on experience for learners and members of the public to meet the following objectives of educating and inspiring high school learners about marine science, ocean conservation, and the vital work of the DFFE. The Open Day encouraged the promotion of careers in environmental fields and showcased diverse pathways within marine sciences. Further awareness activities were demonstrated to the public and learners, highlighting the unique capabilities of the SA Agulhas II research vessel and its vital role in critical research.

World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought

World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought is commemorated on 17 June. It aims to promote community and ecosystem resilience while improving the human condition, particularly in dry lands. According to the UN, droughts are among the greatest threats to sustainable development, especially in developing countries, but increasingly so in developed nations too.

World Wildlife Day

World Wildlife Day is celebrated annually on 3 March. The event brings together representatives of UN member states, UN System organisations and multilateral environmental agreements, civil society, and the private sector for a series of discussions along the theme.

Implementation of the Year 1 targets of the Implementation Plan of the National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (NISCWT) is well under way and cooperation between all stakeholders including government and the private sector is being promoted.

To strengthen the enforcement capabilities of environmental legislation, the National Environmental Management Laws Amendment Bill (Admin Penalties Bill) will provide an Administrative Penalty System as an additional enforcement tool for environmental contraventions.

Marine Week

Each year, the DFFE observes National Marine Week to highlight the importance of oceans and the role they play in the lives of all citizens. It seeks to promote the appreciation of the role of the oceans, and the importance of science, technology, engineering and mathematics support for ocean and coastal management. National Marine Week is celebrated every year during the second week of October. Its purpose is to create awareness of the marine and coastal environment, and the promotion of sustainable use and conservation of these resources, for the benefit of both present and future generations.

Projects, programmes and initiatives Low carbon and climate resilient economy

South Africa is a board member of three significant funding bodies – the Green Climate Fund (GCF), World Bank's Climate Investment Fund and the Global Environment Facility. These memberships enable the country to shape the policies, programming and governance of these respective institutions. The country is also a member of the Partnership for Action on Green Economy.

SANBI and the Development Bank of Southern Africa are accredited as South African Direct Access Entities of the

GCF. The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events around South Africa – from flash flooding in some parts of the country to devastating drought in other parts, has prompted government to sign the Paris Agreement to Combat Climate Change as an acknowledgement that the problem requires a global effort. The country continues to play an active role on the international stage through participation in a number of key multilateral environmental agreements and their associated negotiations.

South Africa's Green Economy Strategy

There is increasing global recognition that today's economic growth and development trajectory is driven by the worldwide shift towards sustainable green economies. South Africa views the green economy as a sustainable development path based on addressing the interdependence between economic growth, social protection and natural ecosystems.

The South African approach ensures that green economy programmes are supported by practical and implementable action plans, emphasising the importance of building on existing best practices, programmes, initiatives and indigenous knowledge, in key sectors, towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon and pro-employment growth path and that government alone cannot manage and fund a just transition to a green economy – the private sector and civil society must play a fundamental role.

Through the DFFE's Green Economy Strategy, the department continues to work towards promoting equitable, inclusive, sustained and environmentally sound economic growth and social development to the benefit of all.

The Green Economy Strategy has eight key pillars, namely:

- Green buildings and the built environment;
- Sustainable transport and infrastructure;
- Clean energy and energy efficiency;
- Natural resource conservation and management;
- Sustainable waste management;
- Water management;
- Sustainable consumption and production; and
- Agriculture food production and forestry.

As outlined in the Integrated Resource Plan, by 2030 the

DFFE aims to have significantly reduced the country's energy demand through technological innovation, good behavioural practices and public commitment to more efficient, sustainable and equitable energy use.

Green Fund

Government set up the Green Fund to support the transition to a low carbon, resource-efficient and climate-resilient development path, delivering high impact economic, environmental and social benefits. The DFFE appointed the Development Bank of Southern Africa as the implementing agent of the Green Fund. The Green Fund aims to provide catalytic finance to facilitate investment in green initiatives that will support poverty reduction and job creation.

The Green Fund is additional and complementary to existing fiscal allocations supporting the transitioning of the South African economy to a low-carbon, resource-efficient and climate resilient growth path. The Green Fund responds to market weaknesses currently hampering South Africa's transition to a green economy by:

- Promoting innovative and high impact green programmes and projects;
- Reinforcing climate policy objectives through green interventions;
- Building an evidence base for the expansion of the green economy; and
- Attracting additional resources to support South Africa's green economic development.

Sustainable development and the green economy

South Africa continues to play an instrumental role within other global co-ordination mechanisms. The final adoption of the Paris Agreement to Combat Climate Change in December 2015 represented a major step forward in international co-operation towards sustainable green, low-carbon and climate-resilient economies globally. During the Paris negotiating process, South Africa played a key role as Chair of the Group of 77 plus China, representing 134 developing countries, and as lead negotiator for the Africa group.

In April 2016, South Africa joined 174 other countries in New York as a signatory to the Paris Agreement. The DFFE

started domestic ratification processes that would enable the entry into force of the agreement in 2020. This new legal framework will guide international efforts to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and enable the transition to climate resilient societies and economies, particularly through the commitment by developed countries to provide financial, technology and capacity building support to developing countries in their effort to address the climate change challenge.

In the lead-up to the Paris climate change negotiations, South Africa submitted its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). South Africa's INDC is guided by the National Climate Change Response Policy and outlines national goals for the country's adaptation effort; and it clearly outlines that South Africa will peak and plateau its GHG emissions by 2030.

Good Green Deeds

The programme is led by the DFFE and aims to promote environmental actions that take into consideration sustainable living practices. At the centre of this campaign are principles of environmental justice, an understanding that becoming environmentally conscious starts with one small action that can go on to inspire global change. South African citizens must strive to work together to restore and maintain mother nature's majesty.

Minister Barbara Creecy launched the Good Green Deeds Awareness: Cleaning and Greening Programme in Gqeberha, Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB) Municipality in the Eastern Cape on 10 November 2023, which saw approximately 3 000 participants being employed within the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality. This programme was launched as an intervention to assist in managing efforts to protect the environment from pollution and conceptualised a national Municipal Cleaning and Greening Programme which was implemented across the NMB Municipality. This programme aims to fight environmental degradation and ensure that our country is free from litter and illegal dumps. This is done through mass public employment of the unemployed with a special prioritisation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

Climate Change Response Policy

The National Climate Change Response Policy is guided by the vision of the NDP of a transition to an inclusive, equitable, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy and society by 2030. By 2030, South Africa plans to have an efficient, lower-carbon public transport system that makes everyday use of private vehicles an unnecessary extravagance. The development of the first phase of desired emission reduction objectives and carbon budgets is well under way. The Carbon Budget System is being introduced in five-year phases – an initial phase from 2016 to 2020, and subsequent phases from 2021 onwards.

Priority focus areas are communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, namely the indigent, rural dwellers and women. Given its demonstrated capacity, SANBI has been appointed the national implementing entity of the Global Adaptation Area. Pilot projects include the Greater uMngeni Catchment area in KwaZulu-Natal, the Mopani District in Limpopo and the Namaqua District in the Northern Cape. These projects, to the value of US\$10 million, include the enhancement of early warning systems, protecting local communities from extreme weather events, and promoting climate smart agriculture practices.

The South African Weather Service (SAWS) continues to host the Global Atmospheric Watch Station at Cape Point, which is one of only three in Africa. This network arose from the need to understand and control the increasing influence of human activity on the global atmosphere and provide climate change information and services.

Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission

In December 2020, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the appointment of members of the inaugural Presidential Climate Change Coordinating Commission (PCCCC). The establishment of the commission emanated from the Presidential Jobs Summit held in October 2018, when social partners agreed that a statutory body be formed to coordinate and oversee the just transition towards a low carbon, inclusive, climate change resilient economy and society.

The PCCCC is tasked with advising on South Africa's climate change response. This includes mitigation and adaptation to climate change and its associated impacts. It will furthermore provide independent monitoring and review of South Africa's progress in meeting its emissions reduction and adaptation goals. Under the commission's terms of reference, it will advise on and facilitate a common understanding of a just transition, cognisant of the socio-economic, environmental and technological implications of climate change. This covers adaptation, mitigation as well as means of implementation.

It also provides a platform for the engagement of key stakeholders on the National Employment Vulnerability Assessment and Sector Job Resilient Plans and ensures reporting of progress towards the implementation of these plans. Chaired by President Ramaphosa, the PCCCC comprises representatives from government departments and state entities, business organisations, labour, academia, civil society, research institutions and traditional leadership. The National Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Framework, aimed at all actors including local governments, was finalised for seven Human Settlement Priority Areas. During the 2023/24 financial year, the DFFE managed to mobilise \$319 456 727.21 for various environmental projects and programmes.

People and parks

South Africa is home to more than nine million ha of protected areas network, which includes national parks, nature reserves and world heritage sites, equating to about 8% of the country's land. These protected areas, among other things, serve as sites for conserving South Africa's ecosystems, protecting high biodiversity value and providing ecosystem services. Most of these protected areas are geographically located in rural areas, forming an integral system with rural communities whose livelihoods and cultures are closely dependent on these protected areas.

Wildlife economy

South Africa is the third most biologically diverse country in the world, and therefore has one of the largest natural

capital assets. This biodiversity is not only vital to the economic well-being of the country but can also be used as a vehicle for social upliftment. The country's biodiversity comes with a number of challenges, ranging from poaching to overexploitation.

The Wildlife Economy in South Africa is centred on the sustainable use of indigenous biological resources, including biodiversity-derived products for trade and bioprospecting, the hunting industry, agriculture and agro-processing of indigenous crops, vegetables and livestock breeds, and indigenous marine resources and fisheries.

The focus of the Wildlife Economy is centred on the socio-economic benefits of eco-tourism, co-managed conservation areas and ancillary services to protected areas. Harvesting indigenous biological resources is a significant source of income for communities. In many cases, one harvester supports an entire household, but the overdependence on these resources has led to the depletion and, at the extreme, the extinction of some of the biodiversity.

For example, the existing commercial market for trade in South African bitter aloe, or aloe ferox, is well established, as is the trade in pelargonium sidoides, buchu, rooibos, honeybush, devil's claw and crocodile fat/oil. These indigenous biological resources are predominantly used in the manufacturing of herbal medicines, cosmetics, food flavours and fragrances.

Additional products with commercial potential for industrial or pharmaceutical application are microorganisms, marine organisms, gums and resins, and venoms. Other significant drivers of the biodiversity economy include trophy hunting and the associated industry of taxidermy, the sale of live game and game meat. Further opportunities exist in the sale of game meat and skins for leather, bones and horns. Another example of a biodiversity-based industry is silk production. Other biodiversity-based products include bee-keeping products (honey, wax, propolis and royal jelly), mopane worms, and ostrich eggshells and feathers.

Managing oceans and coastal conservation

The DFFE continues to support annual research voyages to Antarctica, Marion Island and Gough Island. Servicing the

contract with African Marine Solutions for the manning and operation of two research vessels, SA Agulhas II and SA Algoa, is one of the major cost drivers in the Oceans and Coasts programme, amounting to a projected R557 million over the medium term. Implementing the Oceans Economy Strategy forms part of Operation Phakisa, a fast results delivery programme launched by government in 2014.

An estimated R544.7 million is provided over the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework period in the Oceans and Coasts programme for implementing the Oceans Economy Strategy, which includes activities in marine transport and manufacturing, offshore oil and gas exploration, aquaculture, marine protection services, ocean governance, small harbours, and coastal and marine tourism.

Annually, on the third Saturday of September, volunteers around the world take part in the world's biggest coastal clean-up to celebrate International Coastal Clean-up Day (ICCD) in four coastal provinces. The ICCD initiative remains the largest global volunteer environmental data-gathering effort and clean-up event of coastal areas to date. This year, South Africa has identified the second week of September as Recycle Week and National Clean-up Day with activities scheduled to take place for the week prior to the International Coastal Clean-up/World Clean-up Day, with specific focus on neighbourhoods, water sources and beaches around the country.

The DFFE Expanded Public Works Programmes (EPWP), such as the Cleaning and Greening In-House Model Project, Working for the Coast, Working for Water and Working for Wetlands and the post-flood mop-up team, played a crucial role in ensuring that rivers, wetlands, and beaches are kept clean and in good health. Clean-up and Recycle Week provided a good opportunity to also showcase the department's job creation programs by inviting some of the participants to take part in the clean-up.

In 2023, the plastics industry, private sector entities, NGOs, and local and metropolitan municipalities working in the areas prioritised for the activities in partnership with the and demonstrated their commitment to cleaning up the environment and removing plastics litter from rivers, streams, oceans, neighbourhoods. The department partnered with

CCBSA, PlasticsSA, POLYCO, and other key private companies in this year's Recycle Week, World Clean-up Day, and International Coastal Clean-up Day activities.

Antarctic and Southern Ocean Strategy

South Africa's Antarctic and Southern Ocean Strategy (ASOS) provides for the co-ordination and implementation of the Antarctic Treaties Act, 1996 (Act 60 of 1996), relating to research, conservation, sustainable resource use and environmental management in support of the African agenda. This strategy was approved the day after the world commemorated Antarctica Day, which marked the 61st anniversary of the signing of the Antarctic Treaty. The treaty set aside almost 10% of the Earth forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and in the interests of all humanity.

Antarctica Day is not only a celebration of this important event, but also serves to highlight how diverse nations continue to work together peacefully using science as a common language for co-operation and stewardship of this global commons. The ASOS outlines national interests for the continued participation in the Antarctic Treaty and sets out the vision that Antarctica and the Southern Ocean are understood, valued, and protected in the interest of South Africa, Africa and the world, which is in line with the founding principles of protecting Antarctica as set out by the original signatories to the treaty.

The strategy is the product of extensive engagement with key stakeholders, including the key government departments (and their entities) that are partners in South Africa's National Antarctic Programme – the departments of Science, Technology and Innovation, International Relations and Co-ordination, Public Works and Infrastructure, and Transport. The DFFE also engaged newly identified role players in the space – the Agricultural Research Council, Medical Research Council, Human Science Research Council and others. The strategy outlines an extensive implementation plan over the next five-year period (2021 – 2025).

Entities

iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority

The iSimangaliso was established in 2000 in terms of the World Heritage Convention Act, 1999 (Act 49 of 1999). It is mandated to ensure that active and effective measures are taken to protect and conserve the park; promote the empowerment of historically disadvantaged communities living adjacent to the park; promote, manage, oversee, market and facilitate optimal tourism and related development in the park; and encourage sustained investment and job creation.

The authority's ongoing aim is to support and maintain biodiversity conservation and uphold the park's status as a world heritage site. Over the medium term, the entity will focus on: conserving the environment in the park to mitigate the impact of deforestation and illegal developments on flora and animal habitats, especially those of critically endangered and threatened species; monitoring compliance with governing legislation such as the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act of 1983; removing invasive alien plants from 90 000 hectares of protected wetland areas; and ensuring that at least 9 000 cubic metres of earthworks in wetlands are rehabilitated. To carry out these activities, expenditure is expected to increase at an average annual rate of 10%, from R129 million in 2023/24 to R141 million in 2025/26.

Transfers from the department amount to R332.6 million in 2023/24 period. These transfers decrease at an average annual amount from R332.6 million in 2023/24 to R141 million in 2025/26, due to a one-off allocation from the department in 2023/24 for the implementation of infrastructure investment projects through the EPWP.

The target of clearing areas invaded by invasive alien species was met, which holds significant impact, particularly in enhancing ecological integrity by restoring natural habitats and biodiversity.

To address transformation and socio-economic development, the management of iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority ringfenced 40% of opportunities for previously disadvantaged community groups, with the latest allocation achieving 32%. This includes concessions such as the boating concession at Kosi Bay Lakes.

Notably, iSimangaliso Wetland Park has maintained a zero-rhino poaching record over the past two years.

The DFFE will strengthen enforcement of environmental laws to combat poaching of our fauna and flora and illegal fishing while enhancing regulatory frameworks to ensure that conservation efforts go hand-in-hand with sustainable economic growth and job creation.

The Marine Living Resources Fund

The fund was established in terms of the Marine Living Resources Act, 1998 (Act 18 of 1998). The fund's mandate and core business are to manage the development and sustainable use of South Africa's marine resources, and protect the integrity and quality of the marine ecosystem. The fund also ensures fair and equitable access to South Africa's marine resources for the benefit of all citizens.

Over the medium term, the entity planned to conduct 16 500 enforcement and compliance operations in prioritised fisheries sectors, enabling the effective protection of South Africa's marine resources, creating 4 500 jobs in coastal and rural communities, and broadening the scope of the aquaculture sector by increasing the number of locations and species farmed.

Goods and services account for all of the entity's spending over the next three years. Expenditure is set to increase from R322.8 million in 2023/24 to R352 million in 2025/26 at an average annual rate of 9.5%. Transfers from the department constitute an estimated 66,4% (R1 billion) of the entity's revenue over the period ahead. The remainder is set to be generated through levies charged on fish caught and fish products; application, licence, permit and harbour fees; and fines and confiscations.

South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)

SANBI was established in 2004 in terms of the NEMBA of 2004. Its mandate is to monitor and report on the status of South Africa's biodiversity; all listed threatened or protected species, ecosystems and invasive species; and the impact of any genetically modified organisms released into the environment.

Over the medium term, the institute will focus on restoring and rehabilitating ecosystems across South Africa by maintaining and improving existing national botanical and zoological gardens; conducting research and supporting policies on biodiversity; and refurbishing existing infrastructure in the newly designated and developed national botanical gardens in Kwelera (Eastern Cape) and Thohoyandou (Limpopo).

Expenditure is expected to decrease at an average annual rate of 7.4%, from R588 million in 2023/24 to R542.9 million in 2025/26. Departmental transfers account for 73.9% (R1.7 billion) of the institute's revenue over the medium term, with the remainder set to be generated through entry fees charged at botanical and zoological gardens.

South African National Parks (SANParks)

The SANParks' mandate is to conserve, protect, control and manage national parks and other defined protected areas and their biodiversity. The entity plays a significant role in the economy, as the presence of an efficiently managed system of national parks is a key component of the national tourism economy, and acts as a catalyst for local development. Through the implementation of the EPWP, the entity has provided significant support to small, medium and micro enterprises, particularly in rural areas.

Over the medium term, the entity will focus on fighting poaching, particularly rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park and abalone poaching in the Western Cape; acquiring 30 752 ha of land as part of its land inclusion plan; developing and upgrading infrastructure within national parks; and managing more than four million ha of terrestrial and 369 657 ha of marine protected biodiversity through a system of 21 national parks and 10 marine protected areas. In carrying out these activities, expenditure is expected to increase at an average annual amount from R1.1 billion in 2023/24 to R4.6 billion in 2025/26. The entity expects to generate 63,6% (R5.9 billion) of its revenue over the period ahead through visitor fees and the remainder through transfers from the department.

SANParks is responsible for 21 national parks in seven provinces, with a total area of just more than 4 million ha

and comprising 67% of the protected areas under state management. The national parks include:

- Addo Elephant National Park;
- Agulhas National Park;
- Ai-Ais/Richtersveld Transfrontier Park;
- Augrabies Falls National Park;
- Bontebok National Park;
- Camdeboo National Park;
- Garden Route (Tsitsikamma, Knysna and Wilderness) National Park;
- Golden Gate Highlands National Park;
- Karoo National Park;
- Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park;
- Kruger National Park;
- Mapungubwe National Park;
- Marakele National Park;
- Mokala National Park;
- Mountain Zebra National Park;
- Namaqua National Park;
- Table Mountain National Park (which incorporates the Cape of Good Hope, Table Mountain and Silvermine Nature Reserves);
- Tankwa Karoo National Park; and
- West Coast National Park.

SANParks has secured \$10 million from the Global Environment Facility to fund a project implementing the Mega Living Landscapes concept in the Barberton-Makhonjwa, Greater Addo, and Eastern Cape Grasslands landscapes.

South African National Parks Week

SANParks celebrated its 18th annual SA National Parks Week from 16 to 24 September 2023 with its partners, TotalEnergies Marketing South Africa and FNB. SANParks extended SA National Parks Week to include weekends at some of the national parks. The week granted free access to most of the 21 national parks for day visitors, especially people from the local communities. However, free access to parks did not include free access to accommodation facilities and other tourist activities.

South African Weather Service (SAWS)

The SAWS was established in terms of the South African

Weather Service Act of 2001. Its core mandate is to provide two distinct services: the public good service, funded by government; and commercial services, where the user-pay principle applies. Key activities include maintaining, extending and improving the quality of meteorological services; providing risk-management information; collecting meteorological data over South Africa and the surrounding southern oceans; and fulfilling government's international obligations under the conventions of the World Meteorological Organisation and the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

Over the medium term, the SAWS aimed to focus on: developing and improving early warning infrastructure for severe weather, including climate response initiatives for inclement weather conditions; providing innovative meteorological and related products and services through the development and implementation of community weather-smart products and services; and increasing its provision of aviation meteorological services. Expenditure is expected to decrease at an average annual rate of 19%, from R528 million in 2023/24 to R427 million in 2025/26. The weather service expects to derive 72,2% (R1.6 billion) of its revenue over the medium term through transfers from the department and the remainder through commercial activities and services rendered.

Over the medium term, R375 million will be allocated to improve and optimise the South African Weather Service's RADAR, surface observation, air quality, and ICT infrastructure networks, among other priorities.

Role players

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

In support of the NDP, government is working through the SANBI to spearhead an innovative programme of work on analysing ecological infrastructure and costing natural capital. This body of knowledge will empower the DFFE to make informed development-related decisions. Its research management covers systematics and collections expansion, conservation and applied biodiversity science, and climate change. SANBI is also responsible for ensuring that biodiversity knowledge influences policy, management and decision making.

Its biome programmes, which focus on South Africa's biodiversity hotspots, ensure that the country's most important biodiversity regions, such as grasslands, wetlands and succulent Karoo, are protected in a sustainable and beneficial way. SANBI is increasingly embracing biodiversity in its broadest sense through the inclusion of the country's fauna as part of its taxonomic research mandate. It is coordinating a catalogue of all South Africa's species (at least 100 000), including animals, through the South African Tree of Life Project.

The institute operates environmental education programmes within its national botanical gardens, while outreach greening programmes focus on promoting indigenous gardening at disadvantaged schools in surrounding areas. SANBI is South Africa's official body for facilitating access to the Adaptation Fund, set up to help developing countries cope with climate change. It was established by the parties to the Kyoto Protocol of the UNFCCC to finance concrete adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries that are parties to the protocol.

Environmental resources

National Botanical Gardens

SANBI manages the 10 national botanical gardens, classified as conservation gardens, in seven provinces. Together, they conserve more than 7 500 ha of natural vegetation and associated biodiversity within their boundaries. The national botanical gardens are natural escapes close to some of the country's urban centres, offering visitors a taste of the country's uniquely rich and colourful biodiversity. They feature facilities such as restaurants, function rooms and conference venues and include activities such as hikes, picnics and shopping.

The botanical gardens are:

- Kirstenbosch, Cape Town;
- Pretoria, Tshwane;
- Harold Porter, Betty's Bay;
- Walter Sisulu, Roodepoort;
- Hantam, Nieuwoudtville;
- Free State, Bloemfontein;

- Karoo Desert, Worcester;
- KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg;
- Lowveld, Nelspruit; and
- Kwelera, East London.

SANBI is also managing what is scheduled to become South Africa's 11th national botanical garden – the Thohoyandou Botanical Garden, in the far north-eastern corner of Limpopo.

National Herbarium

The National Herbarium, situated within the Pretoria National Botanical Garden, houses over one million scientific plant specimens from southern Africa. The Crompton Herbarium in Cape Town focuses mainly on the flora of the winter rainfall region of southern Africa, while the KwaZulu-Natal Herbarium in Durban primarily focuses on the flora of the subtropical eastern region of South Africa, in particular the flora of the province.

Protected areas

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), founded in 1992 at the Rio Summit, is a legally binding agreement on the use and conservation of biological diversity. The CBD provides the framework for 196 parties to guide efforts to conserve and sustainably use biological diversity and equitably share the benefits from the use of genetic resources. In October 2010, the parties approved the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for 2011 – 2020, including 20 Aichi Targets. There are a number of management categories of protected areas in South Africa, which conform to the accepted categories of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

South Africa has 528 protected areas, of which 20 are marine, totalling 7.5 million ha or 6,2% of the country's land area. South Africa plans to expand the conservation areas under formal protection to the international standard of 10% of the total area of the country. The DFFE works closely with landowners to ensure their participation in the Stewardship Programme, which allows landowners to use their land for biodiversity and conservation purposes. This is aimed at expanding the country's conservation estate.

In contributing to the expansion of the conservation

estate, 135 047.0450 ha of land were added in the 2023/24 financial year. The study on the interlinkages of migration, drought, land degradation, and drought has been adopted by Cabinet. Additionally, the Policy Position on the conservation and sustainable use of the five iconic species—black and white rhino, lion, leopard, and elephant—was finalised and adopted by Cabinet.

The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act Bill has been completed and released for public comments.

Scientific reserves

Scientific reserves are sensitive and undisturbed areas managed for research, monitoring and the maintenance of genetic sources. Access is limited to researchers and staff. Examples of such areas are Marion Island and the Prince Edward Islands near Antarctica.

Wilderness areas

These areas are extensive, uninhabited and underdeveloped. Access is strictly controlled, with no vehicles allowed. The highest management priority is the maintenance of the intrinsic wilderness character. Wilderness areas include the Cederberg Wilderness Area and Dassen Island in the Western Cape, and the Baviaanskloof Wilderness Area in the Eastern Cape.

Transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs)

A TFCA is a cross-border region. The conservation status of the areas within a TFCA ranges from national parks, private game reserves and communal natural resource management areas to hunting-concession areas. Although fences, highways, railway lines or other barriers separate the constituent areas, they are managed jointly for the long-term sustainable use of natural resources. Unlike in transfrontier parks, free movement of animals between and promote regional peace, cooperation and socio-economic development. The success of TFCAs depends on community involvement. In turn, TFCAs provide local communities with opportunities to generate revenue.

The seven TFCAs are:

- Ai-Ais/Richtersveld (Namibia, South Africa);

- Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (Botswana, South Africa, Zimbabwe);
- Greater Mapungubwe, Kavango-Zambezi (Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe);
- Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (Botswana, South Africa);
- Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation and Resource Area (Mozambique, South Africa, Eswatini); and
- Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area (Lesotho, South Africa).

Biosphere reserves

A biosphere designation is given by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to special landscapes where people are collaborating to ensure environmental integrity as the basis for their economic development. Biosphere reserves are nominated by their governments for inclusion in the Man and the Biosphere Programme. Whether they are terrestrial, freshwater, coastal or marine in nature, all are experimental areas where different approaches to integrated environmental management are tested. This helps to deepen knowledge of what works in conservation and sustainable development.

South Africa's biosphere reserves include:

The 100 000ha Kogelberg Reserve on the country's southern coast is in the middle of the Cape Floral Region and home to 1 880 different plant species, 77 of which are found only in this region. The Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve starts in Cape Town in the southern suburb of Diep River and stretches up the west coast as far as the Berg River, encompassing parts of the Cape Floral Region. The reserve includes the Ramsar-protected Langebaan Lagoon as well as Dassen Island, which is home to a penguin colony.

The Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve includes a part of the Cape Floral Region, as well as the wine-growing region. In the north there is the Waterberg Biosphere Reserve, an area of some 400 000ha in Limpopo. It is an important catchment area for the Limpopo Basin, with four large rivers originating within its borders – the Lephalale, Mokolo, Matlabas and Magalakwena rivers.

The Kruger-to-Canyons Biosphere Reserve stretches from the Kruger National Park to the Blyde River Canyon. It

is an important conservation area as it covers three biomes. The Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve is recognised by the UNESCO in terms of the Man and Biosphere Programme.

World heritage sites

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is listed by the organisation as being of special cultural or physical significance. The organisation catalogues, names and conserves sites of outstanding cultural or natural importance to the common heritage of humanity. While each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the province wherein the site is located, UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

For a site to be awarded a World Heritage status, it has to be recognised as having global historical or environmental significance, signify a phenomenal achievement of humanity or reveal ancient civilisations. The recognition allows the country to access funds for conservation from the World Heritage Fund. To be added onto the list, a country must meet stringent criteria and show how the site will be conserved.

South Africa has 12 world heritage sites proclaimed by the UNESCO:

- **Robben Island** is situated 11km offshore from Cape Town. The island is most famous as the place where Nelson Mandela and his comrades were imprisoned for decades. It is now home to the world-renowned Robben Island Museum and has become a popular tourist attraction.
- **iSimangaliso** was listed as South Africa's first World Heritage Site in December 1999 in recognition of its natural beauty and unique global values. The 332 000ha park contains three major lake systems, eight interlinking ecosystems, 700-year-old fishing traditions, most of South Africa's remaining swamp forests, Africa's largest estuarine system, 526 bird species and 25 000-year-old coastal dunes – among the highest in the world. The name iSimangaliso means "miracle" and "wonder". The park also has four Ramsar sites.
- **The Cradle of Humankind** consists of the hominid fossil sites at Swartkrans, Sterkfontein and Kromdraai. The World Heritage status of Sterkfontein's fossil hominid sites was extended in July 2005 to include the Taung skull fossil site in the North West and Mokopane Valley in Limpopo.

The Cradle of Humankind has one of the world's richest concentrations of hominid fossils that provide evidence of human evolution over the past 3.5 million years. Found in Gauteng and North West, the fossil sites cover an area of 47 000 ha. The remains of ancient forms of animals, plants and hominids are encased in a bed of dolomite deposited around 2.5 billion years ago. In April 2010, a new species of hominid, *Australopithecus sediba*, estimated to be two million years old, was discovered in the Cradle of Humankind.

- **The Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park** (a mixed natural and cultural site) is a World Heritage Site covering 242 813ha (2 428km²). The park spans parts of South Africa and Lesotho. It includes the Royal Natal National Park, a provincial park, and the Drakensberg National Park, which covers part of the Drakensberg, the highest mountain in southern Africa. Under the Ramsar Convention, the park is on the List of Wetlands of International Importance.
- **Mapungubwe Heritage Site:** In September 2011, the DFFE, SANParks and Coal of Africa Limited signed a historic Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) as part of the environmental authorisation issued in accordance with the NEMA of 1998, to ensure the integrity of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site. According to the MoA, the integrity of the World Heritage Site will be maintained through comprehensive biodiversity offset programmes, thereby optimising benefits to local communities.
- **Cape Floral Region:** The smallest of the six recognised floral kingdoms of the world is an area of extraordinarily high diversity and home to more than 9 000 vascular plant species, of which 69% are endemic. Much of this diversity is associated with the fynbos biome. The economic worth of fynbos biodiversity, based on harvests of fynbos products (for example, wildflowers) and ecotourism, is estimated to be about R77 million a year. In July 2015, UNESCO approved the extension of the Cape Floral Region Protected Areas World Heritage Site. At the time of inscription, the site was made up of eight protected areas comprising about 553 000ha. The eight protected areas are located in the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape. The extension brings the size of the World Heritage Site to

1 094 742ha and increases the number of protected area clusters making up the Cape Floral Region from eight to 13.

- **The Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape** covers 160 000 ha of dramatic mountainous desert in the North West. It is the only area where the Nama still construct portable rush-covered, domed houses, or Haru Oms.
- **Vredefort Dome:** About 120 km south-west of Johannesburg, is a representative part of a larger meteorite impact structure, or astrobleme. Dating back more than two million years, it is the oldest astrobleme yet found on Earth. With a radius of 190 km, it is also the largest and the most deeply eroded. The Vredefort Dome bears witness to the world's greatest known single energy release event, which had devastating global effects including, according to some scientists, major evolutionary changes. It provides evidence of the Earth's geological history and is crucial to understanding the evolution of the planet. Despite the importance of impact sites to the planet's history, geological activity on the Earth's surface has led to the disappearance of evidence from most of them, and Vredefort is the only example to provide a full geological profile of an astrobleme below the crater floor.
- **The Khomani Cultural Landscape** covers 959 100 ha, forming part of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and including the whole Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, associated with the former San hunter-gatherers. It is a vast desert area associated with Khomani San culture since the Stone Age.
- **The Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains:** Situated in Mpumalanga, the site comprises 40% of the Barberton Greenstone Belt, one of the world's oldest geological structures. These represent the best-preserved succession of volcanic and sedimentary rock dating back 3.25 to 3.6 billion years.

It features meteor-impact fallback breccias resulting from the impact of meteorites formed just after the Great Bombardment (4.6 to 3.8 billion years ago). It has attracted researchers from all over the world because

of its most exposed layers of rock formations. Scientists found fossilised bacteria under thin layers of rock thought to be 3.2 billion years old.

The Presidency has welcomed the latest inscription of the South African human rights and liberation struggle sites in the prestigious list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

The inscription follows the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in New Delhi, India, held from the 21 to 31 of July 2024.

The inscribed sites, termed as "The Human Rights, Liberation and Reconciliation: Nelson Mandela Legacy Sites", which is a serial property comprising 14 components that are located in four provinces and seven municipalities across South Africa are: the Union Buildings, Constitution Hill, Liliesleaf, Sharpeville (comprising three component parts), Walter Sisulu Square, 16 June 1976: The Streets of Orlando West, University of Fort Hare and ZK Mathews House (comprising two component parts), Mqhekezweni, Waaihoek and Ohlange.

Collectively, this serial property demonstrates the events and ideas that served as the core of South Africa's liberation struggle, which continue to inspire humanity and the embrace of reconciliation, more than 30 years later.

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee further inscribed three Middle Stone Age sites as recognition of South Africa's significant contribution to the understanding of the origins of modern human behaviour.

The Emergence of Modern Human Behaviour: The Pleistocene Occupation Sites of South Africa.

The sites are located in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The three sites are:

- Diepkloof Rock Shelter, close to Elands Bay, Western Cape;
- Pinnacle Point Site Complex in Mossel Bay, Western Cape; and
- Sibhudu Cave in KwaDukuza, KwaZulu-Natal.

Habitat and wildlife management areas

These areas are subject to human intervention, based on research into the requirements of specific species for

survival. They include conservancies; provincial, regional or private reserves created for the conservation of species habitats or biotic communities; marshes; lakes; and nesting and feeding areas.

Protected land and seascapes

These areas are products of the harmonious interaction of people and nature, and include natural environments protected in terms of the Environment Conservation Act, 1989 (Act 73 of 1989), scenic landscapes and historical urban landscapes.

Sustainable-use areas

These emphasise the sustainable use of protected areas such as the Kosi Bay Lake System in KwaZulu-Natal. Nature areas in private ownership are proclaimed and managed to curtail undesirable development in areas with high aesthetic or conservation potential. Conservancies are formed to involve the ordinary landowner in conservation. Landowners can establish a conservancy where conservation principles are integrated with normal farming activities.

Wetlands

The IUCN identifies wetlands as the third most important support system on Earth. Wetlands make up only 2,4% of South Africa's surface area but they are responsible for a disproportionately high value of ecological infrastructure that provides critical ecosystem services such as water purification and flood regulation, among others. Wetlands support a range of specialised plant, insect and mammal life and also supply food, grazing, building and craft material.

They improve water quality, reduce flood impacts, control erosion and sustain river flows. Furthermore, wetlands play a significant role in ensuring a steady supply of clean water for communities and helping government save hundreds of millions of rands that would be required to set up purification plants/facilities.

South Africa was one of the first six countries to become a signatory to the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, when it came into force in 1975. It is an intergovernmental treaty that

provides the framework for national action and international co-operation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The DFFE is responsible for the South African Wetlands Conservation Programme, which ensures that the country's obligations in terms of the Ramsar Convention are met.

South Africa has 22 Ramsar sites, including:

- Barberspan
- Blesbokspruit Nature Reserve
- De Hoop Vlei
- De Mond (Heuningnes Estuary)
- Kosi Bay
- Langebaan
- Makuleke Wetlands
- Ndumo Game Reserve
- Ntsikeni Nature Reserve
- Nylsvley Nature Reserve
- Orange River Mouth Wetland
- Prince Edward Islands in Antarctica
- Seekoeivlei
- St Lucia
- The turtle beaches and coral reefs of Tongaland Ukhahlamba - Drakensberg Park
- Verlorenvlei Nature Reserve
- Wilderness Lakes.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated annually on 2 February. World Wetlands Day 2021 was held under the theme; "Wetlands and Water". Wetlands are rich in biodiversity and are a habitat for a dense variety of plant and animal species. Latest estimates show a global decline of biodiversity, while wetlands are disappearing three times faster than forests. The theme is a unique opportunity to highlight wetland biodiversity, its status, why it matters and promote actions to reverse its loss.

South Africa is one of the contracting parties to the Ramsar Convention. One of the obligations of the contracting parties to the convention is to commemorate World Wetlands Day. South Africa is a water-scarce country, and the water in many streams is polluted. Both droughts and floods

are common. In this regard, wetlands play a vital role by removing toxic substances and sediment from water, while also improving downstream water quality and the overall health of communities.

Wetlands are able to reduce the severity of droughts and floods by regulating stream flow. They also help to purify water and provide a habitat for many different plants and animals. Besides these indirect benefits to society, wetlands provide many direct benefits in the form of resources, such as fibre for making crafts, as well as recreational opportunities. However, a lack of community awareness on the value and benefits of wetlands often leads to their transformation by humans.

Marine protected areas (MPAs)

MPAs conserve natural environments and assist in the management of fisheries by protecting and rebuilding economically important stocks. They are also used to develop and regulate coastal ecotourism opportunities.

Government shares joint responsibility for South Africa's MPAs with the SANParks and Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife.

South Africa's MPAs include:

- Aliwal Shoal, KwaZulu-Natal
- Betty's Bay, Western Cape
- Bird Island, Eastern Cape
- De Hoop, Western Cape
- Dwesa-Cwebe, Eastern Cape
- False Bay, Western Cape
- Goukamma, Western Cape
- Hluleka, Eastern Cape
- iSimangaliso, KwaZulu-Natal
- Langebaan Lagoon, Sixteen Mile Beach, Malgas Island
- Marcus Island, Jutten Island, Western Cape
- Pondoland, Eastern Cape
- Robberg, Western Cape
- Sardinia Bay, Eastern Cape
- Stilbaai, Western Cape
- Table Mountain, Western Cape
- Trafalgar, KwaZulu-Natal
- Tsitsikamma, Western Cape.

Zoological gardens

By mid-2023, the 85ha National Zoological Gardens (NZG), also known as the Pretoria Zoo, housed 3 117 specimens of 209 mammal species, 1 358 specimens of 202 bird species, 3 871 specimens of 190 fish species, 388 specimens of four invertebrate species, 309 specimens of 93 reptile species and 44 specimens of seven amphibian species.

The NZG is the largest zoo in the country and the only one with national status. More than 600 000 people visit the zoo annually. The total length of the walkways in the Zoo in Pretoria is approximately 6km. The highly accredited tourism site, World Atlas, published an article rating the Pretoria Zoo, as one of the 10 best ranked zoos in the world, competing with the well-known Bronx Zoo in New York. An aquarium and reptile Park also form part of the zoo facility in Pretoria.

The aquarium is the largest inland marine aquarium in the country. The third largest collection of exotic trees can be found at the zoo. The NZG has since been incorporated into SANBI. As part of a new repositioning strategy, the zoo will be modernised and its role in species conservation, research, biodiversity education and public engagement, tourism and recreation enhanced. **Some of the government and private venues include the following:**

- **Joburg Zoo** in Johannesburg, which was founded in 1904, covers 55ha of land and houses more than 320 species of animals.
- **Mitchell Park Zoo** in Durban, which was named after Sir Charles Bullen Hugh Mitchell, is the country's second-oldest zoo after the NZG in Pretoria.
- **East London Zoo** is located in the Queens Park Zoological Gardens in East London, Eastern Cape. It is financed and managed by the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality. Apart from the animals, the zoo and gardens contain a treasure trove of flora and fauna, some of which is only found in the Eastern Cape.
- **Birds of Eden** is the world's largest free flight aviary and bird sanctuary, located near Plettenberg Bay in the Western Cape. Its unique two-hectare dome (the world's largest) spans over a gorge of indigenous forest. It is home to more than 3 500 birds from over 220 species, with African birds being the main focus.

- **Umgeni River Bird Park** in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, is situated in 3,5ha of lush tropical landscaping and houses an ever-increasing collection of more than 800 birds from 200 species.
- **World of Birds** is the largest bird park in Africa and one of the few large bird parks in the world. More than 3 000 birds (and small animals) of 400 different species are uniquely presented in more than 100 spacious landscaped walk-through aviaries, allowing you the most intimate closeness with nature.
- **The Bushbabies and Monkey Sanctuary**, situated in Hartbeespoort Dam, provides an environment where monkeys (primates) can be given their freedom in a natural environment. The sanctuary situated in one of the many kloofs (gorges) of the Magaliesberg mountain range provides the perfect environment for monkeys from around the world.

Breeding centres

There are several game-breeding centres in South Africa. The NZG of South Africa is responsible for the management of the Mokopane Biodiversity Conservation Centre, covering 1 333ha. The centre supplements the NZG's breeding programme for various endangered animals, and its own animal collection. It is home to an abundance of exotic and indigenous fauna, such as the lemur, the rare tsessebe, roan antelope and black rhino.

The De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Centre near Pretoria is best known for its captive breeding programme that contributed to the cheetah being removed from the endangered list in the South African Red Data Book – Terrestrial Mammals in 1986. De Wildt also breeds a number of rare and endangered African species. The most spectacular of these is the magnificent king cheetah, which is a true cheetah, but with a variation in coat pattern and colour.

De Wildt also plays a major role in breeding and releasing wild dogs. It has donated breeding nuclei of the highly endangered riverine rabbit and suni antelope to the Kruger National Park. The De Wildt Vulture Unit is a rehabilitation and holding facility for injured, poisoned and disabled

vultures. The Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre in Limpopo was established as a breeding programme for the then endangered cheetah. The centre caters for, among other animals, five species of vulture: Cape griffins as well as white-backed, hooded, white-headed and lappet-faced vultures. The centre is also known for its wild dog breeding programme.

The Hoedspruit Research and Breeding Programme includes the rare black-footed cat, vulnerable African wild cat, ground hornbills (in co-operation with the NZG), the bald ibis and the endangered blue crane. Elephant, white rhino, buffalo, caracal, sable antelope, bushbuck and tsessebe have also been cared for and rehabilitated there.

Aquariums and oceanariums

There are aquariums in Pretoria, Gqeberha, Cape Town, Durban and East London. The Aquarium and Reptile Park of the NZG in Pretoria is the largest inland aquarium in Africa, with the largest collection of freshwater fish. It is also the only aquarium in South Africa that exhibits a large variety of marine fish in artificial seawater and the only inland aquarium housing ragged-tooth sharks.

The Gqeberha Oceanarium is one of the city's major attractions. Exhibits include an underwater observation area, a dolphin research centre, and various smaller tanks containing 40 different species of bony fish and two larger tanks that display sharks and stingrays. The Two Oceans Aquarium at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Cape Town, has more than 3 000 specimens representing some 300 species of fish, invertebrates, mammals, birds and plants supported by the waters along the Cape Coast.

The aquarium at uShaka Marine World in Durban incorporates both freshwater and seawater species, and is the fifth-largest aquarium in the world by water volume. It comprises of Sea World, Dolphin World, Beach World, and Wet and Wild World. Sea World has a unique shipwreck-themed aquarium, a penguin rookery and a 1 200-seater dolphin stadium, the largest dolphinarium in Africa.

Snake and reptile parks

The Gqeberha Snake Park at Bayworld has a wide variety

of South African and foreign reptiles, including tortoises, boa constrictors, pythons, crocodiles, lizards and venomous snakes such as cobras, mambas and rattlers. Rare and threatened species, including the Madagascar ground boa, are housed in realistically landscaped glass enclosures.

The Aquarium and Reptile Park at the NZG houses 80 reptile species from all over the world. The Hartbeespoort Dam Snake and Animal Park near Pretoria features one of the finest reptile collections in southern Africa. It offers seal shows and snake-handling demonstrations. The Pure Venom Reptile Farm is one of the largest of South Africa's reptile parks. It is inland from Shelly Beach, on KwaZulu-Natal's South Coast. The CrocRiver Enviro Park in Nelspruit is the largest facility of its type in Africa.

The park offers, among other things, turtle, crocodile and fishponds; the water monitor lizard pond; and the Desert House, in which a desert-like atmosphere has been created – this is home to the reptile gallery where indigenous and exotic reptiles from all over the world are displayed. Khamai Reptile Centre's primary aims are conservation, breeding of endangered reptiles and education. Located outside Hoedspruit in Mpumalanga, it offers a close-up look at many local as well as exotic snakes, crocodiles and lizards.

Wildlife protection

The Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) states that big cats, which are among the most widely recognised and admired animals, are facing many and varied threats caused mostly by human activities worldwide. South Africa adheres to the principle of sustainable utilisation of natural resources, as well as principles set out in the NDP aimed at creating a climate-resilient society while growing the economy and increasing jobs.

As such, a range of measures have been introduced to ensure that lion, leopard and cheetah populations are conserved and properly managed. This includes the implementation of a Biodiversity Management Plan for the African Lion. The Scientific Authority of South Africa conducted a Non-Detriment Finding (NDF) as required by CITES. The NDF for lions states that there are currently no

major threats to the wild and managed lion populations in South Africa, although the management of re-introduced wild lions needs some improvement.

Minor, but non-detrimental threats, include over-utilisation, disease, poaching and conflict with communities around protected areas. Wildlife crime not only threatens natural resources, but also the economy through financial burdens and the loss of economic and development opportunities. As a country richly endowed with natural resources, South Africa is not immune to these challenges, with criminal syndicates targeting iconic species, such as the cycad, rhino, elephant and lion, as well as species not often considered as being under threat: birds, tortoises, lizards and snakes.

The declaration of wildlife crime as a priority crime in South Africa has resulted in a multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral approach focused on collaboration through the national security structure. This involves border and customs officials, the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), the South African Police Service (SAPS), and institutions such as the Airports Company of South Africa, which manages international airports. The country has also introduced the development of critical skills aimed at increasing its capacity to detect and investigate these crimes.

The DFFE is currently working with the World Wide Fund for Nature on a project to increase the country's ability to tackle wildlife trafficking. This project, funded by the United States Department of State's Bureau of International and Law Enforcement Affairs, focuses on the development of further training materials to bolster the country's national compliance and enforcement programme, including an e-learning platform for officials, audiovisual materials, specific curriculum and manuals.

Traveller awareness material has also been developed to highlight the threat that wildlife crime poses to the rich biodiversity and to encourage people not to support the illegal trade in wildlife. EMLs in the DFFE check consignments of wildlife for exports from South Africa to ensure that they meet all legal requirements. About 300 legal wildlife-related consignments are exported/imported on a monthly basis at the OR Tambo International Airport. The South African Revenue Service (SARS) K9 unit at OR Tambo International

Airport uses specialist sniffer dogs to detect attempts to smuggle wildlife into South Africa.

Rhino poaching

During 2023, 499 rhinos were poached across South Africa; 406 were killed on state properties and 93 on privately owned parks/reserves/farms. This was an increase of 51 compared to 448 rhinos poached in 2022.

The pressure has again been felt in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), with Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park facing the brunt of poaching cases, losing 307 of the total national poaching loss. This is the highest poaching loss within this province. While KZN recorded 49 arrests and 13 firearms seized, multi-disciplinary teams continue to work tirelessly to slow this relentless pressure. Kruger National Park (KNP), in Mpumalanga, recorded 37% decrease from 2022, with a total of 78 poached in 2023. No rhinos were poached in any other national parks.

As part of government's poverty relief programme, there are several fence monitors employed from neighbouring communities that patrol the western boundary fence of the KNP and report fence breakages, illegal tracks and people entering the KNP, as well as animals escaping from the KNP.

In relation to rhino prosecutions, verdicts were handed down in 36 cases, of which 35 resulted in guilty verdicts and one in a not-guilty verdict. The cases resulted in the conviction of 45 accused rhino poachers/rhino horn traffickers, with a conviction rate of 97%.

Because the demand for rhino horn remains a constant threat to rhino populations, collaboration between the law enforcement agencies, including the South African Police Service, Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation and the Green Scorpions, customs officials, the Financial Intelligence Centre and the National Prosecuting Authority remain key. These efforts are supported by private security. An important development in strengthening the collaboration between these role players to effectively address the organised nature of rhino poaching and wildlife trafficking is Cabinet's recent approval in May 2023 of the National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (NISCWT).

This strategy aims to break the illicit value chain of wildlife trafficking in South Africa and beyond its borders. It represents a commitment by government to direct law enforcement ability and effort and mobilise societal support to address the threat wildlife trafficking poses to national security and the country's rich biodiversity. The NISCWT also aims to address the illegal trade in, and poaching of, other species that are threatened by trafficking syndicates, like abalone.

The integrated work of the law enforcement agencies including the SAPS, Hawks, SANParks, Environmental Enforcement Fusion Centre, the Environmental Management Inspectorate or Green Scorpions, customs officials, provincial park authorities, and the NPA has resulted in successful convictions.

Managing rhino populations

The biological management initiative focuses on continued movement of rhinos to expand ranges and support rhino strongholds. In small parks and provincial reserves, the translocation of rhinos seeks to mimic how young animals disperse naturally. Within the KNP, the translocation of rhinos from Kruger as part of South Africa's biological management innovations of expanding ranges and establishing additional rhino strongholds is challenged by the emergence of bovine tuberculosis in both black and white rhino, albeit at low incidence.

South Africa's veterinary regulations require several procedures to ensure that translocated rhinos do not serve as a source of spreading the disease into commercial stock production areas of South Africa. The development of efficient systems to overcome this challenge is in progress. Even so, innovative biological management has used translocations within the KNP as a mechanism to direct poaching to focus less on cows. This goes well with initiatives to dehorn rhinos embedded in strategic approaches that target individuals that frequent poaching hotspots, but more importantly, approaches that minimise the losses of cows.

Complementing these interventions are guarding initiatives that focus on regular individual monitoring of individual rhinos. These combinations of interventions seek to

maximise the breeding potential of both black and white rhinos. The integrated initiatives of SANParks to manage its rhino population have had varied successes. Within the KNP, the continued onslaught of poaching resulted in a continued decline of rhino numbers.

World Ranger Day

The 31st of July marks World Ranger Day. It is celebrated in honour of the men and women that have lost their lives in the line of duty, and those who dedicate their lives to protecting the environment. SANParks honoured its rangers at World Ranger Day celebrations across all 21 national parks.

International cooperation

International co-operation remains a critical component of the overall response strategy to halt rhino poaching and related wildlife crime. South Africa continues to engage countries where rhino horn seizures take place in order to request that samples of the rhino horn DNA be sent to the country for analysis in line with the CITES resolutions. This enables the country to link the seized horns to poaching cases and live rhinos or rhino horn stockpiles, thus providing key information to further support investigations and understand transit routes. The Hawks have also received very good co-operation from China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and Japan in their efforts to combat wildlife trafficking.

Marine pollution and sustainability

South Africa has one of the world's busiest shipping routes and has experienced many oil spills over the years. It is estimated that 80% of the world's tanker traffic passes South Africa's coast. The DFFE developed the National Contingency Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Pollution from Ships, in consultation with the South African Maritime Safety Authority and the Department of Transport.

This includes disposing of, recovering or stabilising spill oil and rehabilitating the environment. With 80% of marine pollution emanating from land-based activities, the DFFE plans to implement the National Programme of Action for Land-based Sources of Pollution, while refining strategies for combating marine pollution from oil spills.

The DFFE has embarked on a process to adopt a new protocol on land-based sources of marine pollution under the amended Nairobi Convention for the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean. The department has also developed the Cape Zone Oil Spill Plan.

Protecting the coastline

To counter illegal activities along the coastline, as well as the country's 1 155 000km² Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), the DFFE boosted its compliance unit with the appointment of more than 80 fishery control officers and 100 honorary fishery control officers, after the implementation of the Honorary Fishery Control Officers Policy. The department took delivery of four environmental protection vessels, as part of measures to protect marine and coastal resources, namely the Lillian Ngoyi, Ruth First, Victoria Mxenge and Sarah Baartman. They patrol up to the 200 nautical mile limit from the shore and the most remote reaches of the EEZ as well as around the Prince Edward Islands.

The vessels also conduct multilateral patrols in the Southern African Development Community coastal states.

The Phakisa approach

Operation Phakisa enables government to implement its policies and programmes better, faster and more effectively. The initiative was designed to fast-track the implementation of solutions on critical development issues. This is a unique initiative to address issues highlighted in the NDP Vision 2030 such as poverty, unemployment and inequality. The DFFE has registered notable progress with regards to Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy; Chemicals and Waste Phakisa and Operation Phakisa: Biodiversity.

Economies

Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy

South Africa is a maritime nation with jurisdiction over one of the largest exclusive economic zones in the world. The country's oceans represent a significant asset for current and future generations, with enormous economic potential, in aquaculture, bioprospecting, marine ecotourism, extractive

industries, and less obvious benefits of healthy ecosystem services, such as climate regulation, carbon storage and waste absorption.

By May 2021, the growing Oceans Economy had contributed R41 billion to South Africa's GDP, creating 26 764 jobs in six focus areas, including marine transport and manufacturing, offshore oil and gas exploration, aquaculture, small harbours development, coastal and marine tourism, marine protection services and ocean governance. The DFFE continues to unlock the economic potential of South Africa's oceans, growing the GDP and creating more sustainable jobs – while ensuring that the country's oceans and coastal ecosystems are sustainably managed. Highlights include the development of the National Guideline Towards the Establishment of Coastal Management Lines.

This is intended to minimise risks posed by short- and long-term coastal processes such as storm surges, erosion and sea level rise. A national coastal access strategy is also being developed to provide guidance around the public's access to closed-off beaches. Marine pollution is another challenge that threatens fragile ecosystems. South Africa has a number of measures in place to tackle this problem, including the National Pollution Laboratory operated by the Walter Sisulu University, which is expected to start working in the near future.

The laboratory will allow for in-depth analysis of the samples that could not be done through mobile laboratories. In addition, South Africa is amongst the countries that have endorsed the UN Environment Programme's Clean Seas Campaign. The campaign is aimed at stepping up international, regional and national efforts to combat marine litter. As part of the campaign, the DFFE has announced the piloting of its Source-to-Sea Initiative – a strategy to combat threats to both freshwater and marine ecosystems. The oceans have the potential to contribute up to R177 billion to the GDP and create over one million jobs by 2033.

Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy MPAs

The gazetting of a network of 20 representative Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy MPAs has increased South Africa's marine ecosystem area under protection in the

country's EEZ, from 0,4% to 5,4%, to provide protection to 90% of habitat types, as well as contribute to global protection in line with South Africa's international commitments.

The network strives to support multiple objectives for biodiversity in alignment with the Oceans Economy goals. The MPAs represent seamounts, submarine canyons, volcanic pinnacles and a variety of ecosystem types on the shelf, continental margin and abyss in both the Indian and Atlantic oceans. They also provide the first protection for several threatened and fragile ecosystem types, including threatened mud, gravel, and shelf edge habitats and sensitive deep-water scleractinian, stylasterine and soft coral-dominated ecosystem types.

The 20 MPAs will, among other things, contribute to fisheries sustainability, advance marine ecotourism and help maintain resilience in ecosystems that are under stress from climate change. Work on these MPAs dates back to 2014, when government endorsed a plan to achieve, as part of Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy, a viable network of MPAs. South Africa's ocean space, which is one of the most varied in the world, is highly productive with rich biodiversity providing for living and non-living resources that contribute significantly to the country's economy and to job creation. MPAs provide safe spaces in which fish can breed undisturbed.

They are essential to maintain eco-certification of the South African deep-sea trawl fishery. This certification process assesses whether habitat and nursery areas for hake fishery are adequately protected. MPAs also contribute to growing South Africa's marine eco-tourism sector by providing undisturbed natural habitat for whales, sharks, seals, dolphins, turtles and seabirds for international and domestic tourists to experience.

An adequate network of MPAs will also provide the basis for ongoing resilience to the impact of climate change. Oceans are an essential component of the climate system, absorbing and transferring heat, and regulating the exchange of carbon dioxide with the atmosphere. With increasing carbon dioxide levels and rising ocean temperatures, this regulatory capacity is at risk. The network of MPAs will assist in building ecological resilience, and therefore social and economic resilience in the growing Oceans Economy.

Operation Phakisa: Biodiversity Economy

South Africa has a multi-faceted approach to the management of its rich natural heritage. The approach focuses on an inclusive, value-chain approach to the development of the biodiversity economy, taking into consideration the fact that communities are the primary custodians of the country's biodiversity.

To attract investments in the biodiversity economy, we profiled 54 bankable businesses on the Biodiversity Sector Investment Portal. As a result, two projects attracted an investment of \$450 000 to promote conservation and community well-being.

Cabinet approved for public comment the revised National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES). The revised NBES seeks to advance an inclusive biodiversity sector that locally beneficiates the rich indigenous biological and genetic resources for a thriving people and nature. This renewed NBES was central to discussions during the 2024 Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba (BEII) held in March.

Operation Phakisa: Chemicals and Waste

The waste economy has the potential to address inequality, alleviate poverty and create jobs. The DFFE continues to support waste pickers through various programmes, such as the Recycling Enterprise Support Programme. The primary objective of the programme is to provide developmental funding for projects in the form of start-up grants. These projects are either start-up or pre-existing enterprises establishing buy-back centres, material recovery facilities, construction and demolishing solutions and plastic palletisation plants in line with the Operation Phakisa initiatives.

In terms of chemicals, Cabinet has recommended that South Africa should ratify the Minamata Convention on Mercury and the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on the Protection of the Ozone Layer. The Kigali Amendment will have co-benefits for mitigating climate change and ozone depletion. The South African government is also committed to minimise plastic pollution.

The DFFE recently conducted a Plastic Material Study and is in the process of consulting with the cosmetics industry to phase out the use of microbeads in cosmetics. Plans are also underway to review the impact of the implementation of plastic bag policies. In addition, the DFFE will continue to work with the packaging sector (paper, glass, plastic and metal) to raise the amount of waste diverted from landfill to above 58%.

The department is expected to launch the Keep South Africa Clean Campaign with the aim of mobilising citizens to become environmentally conscious and create a South Africa free of litter and illegal dumping.

The department is committed to supporting local government in increasing waste diversion from landfill sites through reuse, recycling, and recovery, focusing on packaging waste such as paper, plastic, and glass through Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes. Eight municipalities are targeted to receive EPR infrastructure and support for separate waste collection.

The department surpassed its target for reducing Hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs) in 2023, achieving more than a 50% reduction. Our efforts are aiding the restoration of the ozone layer, with scientific data showing that the ozone hole is shrinking due to the effective management of Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS).

The DFFE published Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes for Paper and Packaging, E-waste and Lighting for implementation on pesticides, portable batteries and lubricant oils. This will create economic incentives to promote waste reduction; encourage product design to cater for recyclability, re-use and treatment; and facilitate a circular economy.

During the 2023/24 financial year, 338 municipal councillors and officials were trained on waste management, which contributes to capacitating local government to deliver on the waste management mandate.

The DFFE will continue to provide technical assistance to municipalities applying for waste management fleet purchases using parts of municipal infrastructure grants to enhance waste collection services, combat illegal dumping, and improve landfill site management. Thirty-two

municipalities have received support for cleaning campaigns aimed at enhancing cleanliness.

The implementation of the Municipal Greening and Cleaning Programme through a partnership model with the municipalities created the most work opportunities. The partnership had the department paying for the EPWP stipends and providing the primary project management responsibilities. The municipalities provided personal protective equipment (PPE), tools of trade and medical screening. The Municipal Greening and Cleaning Programme contributed to the waste management service delivery through daily cleaning-up and clearing of illegal dumping hotspots.

Recently, Cabinet approved the Industry Waste Tyre Management Plan (IndWTMP) for implementation. It was prepared in accordance with Section 29 of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act.

In the 2023/24 financial year, 53 333 tons of waste tyres were processed, marking a 38% increase from 36 354,76 tons in the previous year. Additionally, approximately

25 000 tons were exported, diverting them from storage.

Chemicals and waste management

South Africa has taken steps to promote the environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste throughout the life cycle, including being a party to a range of multilateral environment agreements and an active member in instruments on chemicals and waste.

These include the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade; Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer; Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes; and Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management, which is governed by the International Conference on Chemicals Management.

South Africa had a significant role in negotiations concerning the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to prepare a global legally binding instrument on mercury, including research into coal-dependent power or electricity

stations and the situational analysis of mercury in the country. To align fragmented legislation, the DFFE established a National Multi-Stakeholder Committee for Chemicals Management to facilitate co-ordination. The 2020 National Waste Management Strategy gives effect to the terms of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act of 2008. It directs the environmental protection programmes. It also drives a sustainable and environmentally friendly, inclusive economic growth, with three focus pillars – waste minimisation, effective and sustainable services, and waste awareness and compliance.

Waste Management Bureau

The Waste Management Bureau aims to reduce waste through recycling. The bureau monitors recycling plans and provides specialist services to government and recycling companies. Over the medium term, the bureau plans to introduce tyre recycling initiatives. The bureau also plans to introduce the Recycling Enterprise Support Programme, which will provide support services, training and advice to transporters, storage depot operators and tyre recyclers.

Youth Jobs in Waste and Township Greening

These projects are funded by the DFFE through its Environmental Protection and Infrastructure Programme and aim to contribute towards poverty alleviation while empowering beneficiaries to participate in the mainstream economy. Youth will benefit from this project through the formation of self-help groups, which will positively impact on their knowledge of financial literacy and self-empowerment.

The Youth Jobs in Waste initiative is focused on landfill operation and management, planning administration relating to waste collection and planning and undertaking waste awareness campaigns. The people who will be assisting with the activities will be based in different municipalities for a year. The DFFE aims to create eco-friendly, greener open spaces that are safe, attractively designed, and well managed for the benefit of all the country's communities as well as promoting maximum use of alternative energy sources and an environment that is clean, green and healthy for all.

The department has funded numerous projects within the

Randfontein Municipality, which are being implemented using labour-intensive methods in line with the EPWP, targeting 60% women in employment, 55% youth and 2% persons with disabilities. The waste sector has been identified as a key role player in achieving the goal of economic upliftment through job creation as the DFFE works towards reaching the NDP's goal of creating an environmentally sustainable, climate change resilient, low-carbon economy and just society by 2030.

The Youth Jobs in Waste Programme was designed to address some of the critical areas of assistance, including capacity-building, where youth are placed in municipalities for a period of a year to assist with administration relating to waste collection and planning.

Recycling

The National Recycling Forum is a non-profit organisation created to promote the recovery and recycling of recyclable materials in South Africa. Members of the forum include representatives of:

- the formal recycling industry in South Africa;
 - government departments;
 - regional recycling forums;
 - local government-based organisations; and
 - local government utilities and co-opted advisory members.
- To promote the interests of its members and the formal recycling industry in South Africa, the National Recycling Forum:
- Provides a national communication forum for key players in the field of recycling; interacts with central and provincial government to encourage the recycling of glass, paper, plastics, tinsplate steel, used oil and electrical and electronic waste; facilitates the formation of regional forums that draw their memberships from enthusiastic and interested volunteers as well as small recyclers, in the major centres of South Africa; and encourages the establishment of buy-back centres and drop-off points through the activities of its members in the various centres.
 - Collect-a-Can, one of the oldest recycling initiatives in South Africa, has been instrumental in creating a culture of recycling in the country. It has obtained local and

international acclaim for its contribution towards protecting the environment, as well as its significant contribution to job creation and poverty alleviation.

The founders of Collect-a-Can, ArcelorMittal South Africa and Nampak, started the company 23 years ago to proactively address the steel beverage can industry's responsibility to the environment. Their Cash for Cans initiative encourages cans to be collected and sold to Collect-a-Can for cash, because recovery and recycling aid job creation in many communities and create an additional source of income for schools, NGOs, and other community groups.

Collect-a-Can has introduced millions of school children to caring for the environment through its schools' competition. Recycling has been valued at a contribution of as much as R50 billion to the South African economy. In effect, waste is now a renewable resource and not something to throw away.

Clean-up and Recycle SA Week

The Clean-up and Recycle SA Week is an annual initiative by the local plastics industry, supported and endorsed by various packaging and retail streams and retailers. Each year, close to 120 000 volunteers participate in these clean-up activities that take place along roadsides, rivers, schools, residential and illegal dumping areas. The initiative is supported by the DFFE, provincial governments, municipalities, environmental organisations, businesses, schools and communities with the intention to promote and unite the world's approach towards clean-up campaign initiatives.

The DFFE has been celebrating the Clean-up and Recycle Week SA through awareness-raising activations to encourage communities to know the benefits of keeping their environment clean and diverting their waste away from landfill sites through innovative means, either through reduction, reuse, repurposing, recycling or upcycling of their waste materials.

The Clean-up and Recycle SA Week's objectives are clearly aligned with those of the Good Green Deeds Programme as it seeks to highlight the importance of active

citizenry in the protection and management of natural resources and pollution in the neighbourhoods they live in, rivers, oceans and the role they play in the lives of all South Africans.

Climate change and air quality management

South Africa is making steady progress in implementing the National Climate Change Response Policy, despite having to balance its economic aspirations and environmental protection. Government continues to engage actively and meaningfully in international climate change negotiations, specifically with the UNFCCC.

The policy implementation actions and activities flowing from this include the analysis of mitigation potential in key economic sectors as the basis for the establishment of desired emission reduction outcomes and defining the optimal mix of measures for achieving those outcomes, with the greatest benefit and least cost to the economy.

Air quality remains an important and challenging environmental issue in South Africa. Technical and legislative tools have been developed to roll-out and monitor the implementation of national environmental management, including the:

- National Framework for Air Quality Management;
- Air quality model by-laws;
- Air-quality management planning manual;
- National Ambient Air Quality Standards and Listed Activities; and the
- Minimum Emission Standards.

Several of these tools were under review to accelerate the ongoing implementation of the Air Quality Act of 2004. The South African Air Quality Information System (SAAQIS) contains the latest updated data on locations and can give the status of air quality or pollution for a specific day and time on its website: www.saaqis.org.za. The DFFE and the SAWS have upgraded the SAAQIS. South Africans can now view the state of air live from the government monitoring network on their smartphones and other gadgets.

Several air quality monitoring stations, mostly in Mpumalanga, eThekweni Municipality, the City of

Johannesburg and the City of Tshwane, report to the SAAQIS. South Africa reached the legally binding climate change agreement at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC in Paris, France in December 2015.

The agreement was the culmination of a four-year negotiation process that was initiated in Durban in 2011 at the 17th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC. South Africa is among the countries that have signed the Paris Agreement – committing to ensuring that the country continued to play a positive role in the building of a low-carbon, job-creating and pro-development green economy.

17th Air Quality Governance Lekgotla was hosted on 04 to 06 September 2023 at the Protea Hotel The Ranch in Limpopo. The theme of the 2023 Annual Air Quality Governance Lekgotla was “Scalable Emission Reduction by 2030”. The deliberations were to prioritise the establishment of a platform that will take forward the implementation of emission reduction through tools and interventions that support the implementation objective. This included a focused compliance effort, a functional atmospheric emission licensing regime and a functional ambient air quality monitoring network. The Lekgotla provided an opportunity for government officials to interact and strengthen regulatory tools towards improved air quality management. Various air quality officials from all three spheres of government participated in various issues such as air quality management planning tools, ambient air quality monitoring and compliance monitoring and enforcement.

Environmental Impact Assessment

The environmental impact assessment is a tool to advance sustainable development. South Africa's environmental impact assessment regulations are:

- streamlining the environmental impact assessment process;
- introducing an approach where impact on the environment gets more attention; and
- introducing a listing notice dedicated to activities planned for predefined sensitive areas.

The Environmental Assessment Practitioners Association of South Africa (EAPASA) aims to:

- achieve effective quality assurance in environmental assessment practice in South Africa;
- promote the empowerment of black and female professionals within the environmental assessment field;
- encourage continued professional development for environmental assessment practitioners; and
- promote awareness of the purpose and practice of environmental assessment in South Africa.

The DFFE is already fully integrating impact assessments on waste and environmental impact assessment. In order to advance and fast-track environmental authorisations for key infrastructure projects, the department continues to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessments. The vast scientific information from these assessments has aided in the streamlining of decision making for South Africa's Strategic Infrastructure Projects led by The Presidency.

For the 2023/24 financial year, the department finalised and issued decisions on 100% (99/99) national environmental impact assessment applications within the stipulated time frame of 57 working days, for applications within the gazetted Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Corridors. For other applications not within the gazetted SEA Corridors, the department finalised 99% (221/224) National Environmental Impact Assessment applications within stipulated time frame of 107 working days. The department's Directorate of Appeals and Legal Review concluded 16 Eskom Minimum Emission Standards appeal decisions and prioritised and finalised 30 energy-related appeals within the financial year, assisting in relieving the energy situation.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture incorporates the breeding, trading or rearing of aquatic organisms in a controlled or selected aquatic environment for recreational, commercial or subsistence purposes. It is divided into freshwater culture and mariculture. Species farmed in the latter include dusky kob, abalone, Pacific oysters, Mediterranean mussels and black mussels, among others. According to the National Aquaculture Strategic Framework, the sector is relatively small, and government wants to create a climate in which it can grow. Special attention will be paid to freshwater aquaculture, as it has shown growth potential.

Government is also planning to boost investments in research, development technology, transfer and extension, as well as education and training programmes in aquaculture. Abalone fishing is severely restricted in South African waters; however, poaching is rife, as it is a lucrative trade. Poaching has caused the decline in abalone numbers over the years. The species is highly coveted and fetches high prices, especially in the Far East.

The National Aquaculture Policy Framework was developed against the backdrop of a global aquaculture sector that has seen an increased demand for fishery products. The policy provides a unified framework for the establishment and development of an industry that contributes towards sustainable job creation and increased investment. In South Africa, marine and freshwater aquaculture presents a good opportunity to diversify fish production to satisfy local demand; contribute to food security, job creation, economic development and rural development; and improve export opportunities.

Aquaculture has been given a boost through its inclusion in the Oceans Economy: Operation Phakisa. While the marine-based mariculture part of aquaculture has been around for some years, focusing on species such as abalone, oysters and mussels, freshwater aquaculture is experiencing a rapid expansion, owing in part to government's multi-pronged aquaculture promotion campaign.

Globally, wild fish stocks have been dwindling, growing at a modest 1% per annum, while aquaculture has grown by 7% and accounts for 44% of the global fish production. As such, aquaculture is seen as a quick win for growing the Oceans Economy.

Erosion and desertification

The health of the country's soil is of great concern. Community-managed land has the potential to generate billions of rands worth of ecosystem benefits in South Africa through, for example, reduced pollution, clean water and erosion control. It adds that investment in avoiding land degradation and restoring degraded land makes sound economic sense and the benefits generally far exceed the costs. As such, the country has managed to secure

more than \$3.6 million through the Global Environment Facility's fund for the implementation of a project to address desertification, land degradation and the effects of drought in grazing lands in Limpopo and the Northern Cape.

Globally, negotiations are underway to discuss possible options for addressing drought under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). According to the UN Environment Programme, desertification affects 900 million people in 99 countries, with 24 million metric tons (Mt) of topsoil being lost to erosion annually. The resultant land degradation costs Africa about \$9 billion every year. Most South African soil is unstable. The country loses an estimated 500 Mt of topsoil annually through erosion caused by water and wind.

About 81% of South Africa's total land area is farmed. However, only 70% of this area is suitable for grazing. Overgrazing and erosion diminish the carrying capacity of the veld and lead to land degradation. This process has already claimed more than

250 000 ha of land in South Africa. South Africa is a signatory to the UNCCD. Its main objectives include cooperation between governments, organisations and communities to accomplish sustainable development, especially where water resources are scarce.

South Africa also acts as the co-ordinator for the Valdivia Group for Desertification. The group consists of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, New Zealand, South Africa and Uruguay. The aim is, among other things, to foster scientific and technological co-operation. South Africa has introduced legislation such as the NEMBA of 2004 to promote the conservation of biodiversity, and fight desertification and land degradation.

Biodiversity

South Africa is home to some 24 000 species, around 7% of the world's vertebrate species, and 5,5% of the world's known insect species (only about half of the latter have been described). In terms of the number of endemic species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians found in South Africa, the country ranks as the fifth richest in Africa and the 24th richest in the world. Marine biodiversity is also

high, with more than 11 000 species found in South African waters, which is about 15% of global species.

More than 25% of these species (or 3 496 species) are endemic to South Africa, many of which are threatened, especially in river ecosystems (82%) and estuaries (77%). South Africa ratified the Nagoya Protocol, a 2010 supplementary agreement to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) that ensures fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

The protocol is a legally binding agreement outlining a set of terms prescribing how one country will gain access to another country's genetic resources and how the benefits derived will be shared. The aim of the National Biodiversity and Business Network is to assist businesses from various sectors to integrate and mainstream biodiversity issues into their strategies and operations. Government and businesses are realising that the economic and social development of the country depends on healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. The NDP confirms that national economic growth depends on the environmental sustainability of the country's proposed development path.

South Africa is the third most biodiverse country in the world, after Indonesia and Brazil. These countries harbour most of the Earth's species and collectively accommodate more than two thirds of global biodiversity. South Africa is a signatory to several biodiversity-related multilateral agreements such as the:

- CBD Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety;
- Ramsar Convention;
- CITES;
- UNCCD; and
- Convention on Migratory Species.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2015 – 2025 is aimed at establishing a framework and plan of action for the conservation and sustainable use of South Africa's biodiversity and the equitable sharing of benefits derived from this use. The National Biodiversity Framework (NBF) provides a framework to co-ordinate and align the efforts of the many organisations and individuals involved in conserving and managing South Africa's biodiversity, in support of sustainable development. The NBF is a requirement of the NEMBA of 2004.

The NBF and the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy are important existing policy instruments for the protection of species and ecosystems. Through the release of the National Biodiversity Assessment by SANBI, the country is able to better target future protected area expansion. The assessment has also assisted with South Africa's national and international reporting obligations, including the state of environment reporting, and the CBD Country Report – reporting against Aichi Targets or the Sustainable Development Goals.

The revised NBF has been approved for public comment. Three internationally recognised biodiversity hotspots are found in South Africa. They are the:

Cape Floral Kingdom (equivalent to the fynbos biome); Succulent Karoo (shared with Namibia); and Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany Centre of Plant Endemism, which stretches from the Albany Centre in the Eastern Cape, through the Pondoland Centre of Plant Endemism and KwaZulu-Natal, and the eastern side of Eswatini, into southern Mozambique and Mpumalanga. The Succulent Karoo Biome is one of only two arid biodiversity hotspots in the world, the other being the Horn of Africa. There are eight major terrestrial biomes, or habitat types, in South Africa, which are divided into 70 veld types.

Cabinet has approved the release of the Report of the Ministerial Task Team for consideration of voluntary exit options and pathways for the captive lion industry.

The prohibition notice on the establishment/registration of new captive lion breeding facilities was finalised for approval for implementation and approved by the Minister in March 2024.

The Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy, hosted the International Day of Biological Diversity on 22 May 2024 at Wits University, Johannesburg. The theme was "From Agreement to Action: Build Back Biodiversity". Scientific evidence tells us that biodiversity loss, together with climate change, poses an existential threat to the future of humanity. Our government adopted the White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity, which is intended to ensure we domesticate this significant global agreement. The White Paper calls for

change in business practices to reduce biodiversity loss, adding net value, or at least ensuring no net biodiversity loss. It therefore provides an excellent opportunity for South African businesses to contribute towards achieving global targets for biodiversity conservation.

Sustainable development and transformation require the private sector and government to work together to achieve common goals. In the case of biodiversity conservation, businesses can contribute significantly by adopting environmentally responsible practices, promoting sustainable development, and minimising negative impacts on fragile ecosystems. However, achieving these goals will require government to draw up supportive policies and ensure the effective enforcement of environmental regulations.

South Africa, Malaysia, Colombia and India, have been selected to participate in the Global Environment Facility project entitled Business Action and Advocacy for the Planet. The project is executed by Business for Nature, hosted at the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and supported by local partners in each country. In South Africa, the project is to be implemented by the National Biodiversity and Business Network (NBBN) of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. The EWT is uniquely positioned to partner with the DFFE and SANBI to support the development of action-orientated targets and solutions for the implementation of the business-related aspects of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The project will engage both large and small companies and will see the drafting of a government-led business action plan on biodiversity. The outcomes of this project will also inform the revision of the 2015 to 2025 National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. It is of paramount importance that all these processes result in the creation of a national target on the role of business in biodiversity conservation. There is also a fast-expanding programme of work centred around nature-related risks to economic sectors. This work will help us to better understand risks associated with diminishing ecosystem services and provide input into decision-making and policy.

In support of this programme, the French Development

Agency (Agence Française de Développement), in collaboration with SANBI and the department, has developed South Africa's first study on nature-related risks and opportunities. The research highlights the complex relationship that ecosystem services have with our traditional business sectors and the role they play in providing people and communities with socio-economic contributions.

By mainstreaming biodiversity considerations into operations, products, and services, South African businesses can promote sustainable development and ensure the responsible management of the country's natural resources. Through broad-based partnerships and co-operation, we can succeed in ensuring that we restore and protect our country's biodiversity.

Minister Barbara Creecy hosted the Biodiversity Economy and Investment Indaba Presidential event from 24 to 28 March 2024 at the Birchwood Hotel in Boksburg, Gauteng. South Africa is a special country with exceptional biodiversity, much of which is unique and makes us one of the world's megadiverse countries. This biodiversity wealth gives people tangible benefits like food, clean water, medicine and materials. It supports agricultural and fisheries production and helps protect us from natural hazards such as droughts and floods, and provides a vibrant tourism industry while offering natural spaces for recreational, spiritual and cultural activities.

The African Biotrade Festival was hosted between 14 and 15 September 2023 at Sandton Convention Centre in Gauteng. Biodiversity is the foundation for BioTrade value chains. Access and benefit-sharing (ABS) helps to ensure that these value chains contribute to conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ultimately trigger socio-economic development. In this context, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH manages three projects hosted on this platform: The ABS Capacity Development Initiative, BioInnovation Africa and ABS-compliant Value Chains in South(ern) Africa (ABioSA).

A total of 1 467 000 visitors visited national gardens, and more than 217 000 children and youth participated in the "Kids in Gardens" Biodiversity Education Programme", which is run in national botanical and zoological gardens.

National biodiversity biomes

Savanna Biome

The Savanna Biome is the largest biome in southern Africa, occupying 46% of its area, and over a third of South Africa. It is an area of mixed grassland and trees, generally known as bushveld. In the Northern Cape and Kalahari sections of this biome, the most distinctive trees are the camel thorn (*Acacia erioloba*) and the camphor bush (*Tarchonanthus camphoratus*). In Limpopo, the portly baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) and the candelabra tree (*Euphorbia ingens*) dominate.

The central bushveld is home to species such as the knob thorn (*acacia nigrescens*), bushwillow (*Combretum spp.*), monkey thorn (*Acacia galpinii*), mopani (*Colophospermum mopane*) and wild fig (*Ficus spp.*). In the valley bushveld of the south, euphorbias and spekboom trees (*Portulacaria afra*) dominate. Abundant wild fruit trees provide food for many birds and animals in the Savanna Biome. Grey loeries, hornbills, shrikes, flycatchers and rollers are birds typical of the northern regions.

The subtropical and coastal areas are home to Knysna loeries, purple-crested loeries and green pigeons. Raptors occur throughout the biome. The larger mammals include lion, leopard, cheetah, elephant, buffalo, zebra, rhino, giraffe, kudu, oryx, waterbuck and hippopotamus. About 8.5% of the biome is protected. The Kruger National Park, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, iSimangaliso and other reserves lie in the Savanna Biome.

Nama-Karoo Biome

The Nama-Karoo is the third-largest biome in South Africa, covering about 20,5% of the country or more than 260 000km². It stretches across the vast central plateau of the western half of the country. This semi-desert receives little rain in summer. Rainfall varies from about 200 millimetres (mm) a year in the west to 400mm a year in the north-east.

Summer is very hot, and winter is very cold with frequent frost. Most of the plants are low shrubs and grass. Many plants are deciduous. Trees such as the sweet thorn (*Acacia karoo*) are usually only found along rivers or on rocky hillsides. Common animals include the bat-eared fox,

ostrich, spring hare, tortoises and brown locust. The riverine rabbit is a threatened species found in the Nama-Karoo Biome. This biome includes the Namaland area of Namibia, and the central Karoo area of South Africa. Because of low rainfall, rivers are non-perennial.

Cold and frost in winter and high temperatures in summer demand special adaptation by plants. Only 1% of the Nama-Karoo Biome falls within officially protected areas, of which the Karoo and Augrabies national parks are the largest. Overgrazing and easily eroded soil surfaces are causing this semi-desert to advance slowly on the neighbouring savanna and grassland biomes.

Grassland Biome

The Grassland Biome is the second-largest biome in South Africa, covering an area of 339 237 km² and occurring in eight of South Africa's nine provinces. It is one of the most threatened biomes in South Africa, with 30% irreversibly transformed and only 1.9% of the biodiversity target for the biome formally conserved. The Grassland Biome provides essential ecosystem services, such as water production and soil retention necessary for economic development. It holds important biodiversity of global and domestic significance and value.

Trees are scarce and are found mainly on hills and along riverbeds. Karee (*Rhus lancea*), wild currant (*Rhus pyroides*), white stinkwood (*Celtis africana*) and several acacia species are the most common. The Grassland Biome has the third-largest number of indigenous plant species in the country. Eight mammal species endemic to South Africa occur in the wild in this biome. The area is internationally recognised as having high species endemism for birds. The black korhaan, blue crane and guinea fowl are among the birds found in the area.

Succulent Karoo Biome

The Succulent Karoo Biome covers a flat to gently undulating plain, with some hilly and broken veld, mostly situated to the west and south of the escarpment, and north of the Cape Fold Belt. One of the natural wonders of South Africa is the annual blossoming of the Namaqualand wild flowers (mainly

of the family asteraceae), which transforms the semi-desert of the Northern Cape into a fairyland. After rain, the drab landscape is suddenly covered with a multicoloured carpet of flowers (from August to October, depending on the rainfall).

This is a winter rainfall area with extremely dry and hot summers. Succulents with thick, fleshy leaves are plentiful. Most trees have white trunks to reflect the heat. The quiver tree (aloe dichotoma) and the human-like elephant's trunk (pachypodium namaquanum) are prominent in the Richtersveld. Grass is scarce. The animal life is similar to that of the neighbouring Fynbos and Nama-Karoo biomes. The biome includes 2 800 plant species at increased risk of extinction.

Fynbos Biome

The Fynbos Biome is one of the six accepted floral kingdoms in the world. This region covers only 0,04% of the Earth's land surface. Fynbos, which is found mainly in the Western Cape, is the name given to a group of evergreen plants with small, hard leaves (such as those in the Erica family). It is made up mainly of the protea, heathers and restio. The Fynbos Biome is famous for the protea, which is South Africa's national flower.

The biome also contains flowering plants now regarded as garden plants, such as freesia, tritonia, sparaxis and many others. Protected areas cover 13,6% of the Fynbos Biome and include the Table Mountain and Agulhas national parks. This biome is not very rich in bird and mammal life, but does include the endemic Cape grysbok, the geometric tortoise, the Cape sugarbird and the protea seed-eater. Baboon, honey badgers, caracal, the buck and several types of eagle and dassies are found in the mountains.

Forest Biome

South Africa's only significant natural forests are those of Knysna and Tsitsikamma in the Western and Eastern Cape respectively. Other reasonably large forest patches that are officially protected are in the high-rainfall areas of the eastern escarpment (Drakensberg mountains), and on the eastern seaboard. Forest giants such as yellowwood (Podocarpus spp.), ironwood (Olea capensis) and lemonwood (Xymalos monospora) dominate.

The indigenous forests are a magical world of ferns, lichens and colourful forest birds such as the Knysna loerie, the endangered Cape parrot and the rameron pigeon. Mammals include the endangered samango monkey, bushpig, bushbuck and the delicate blue duiker.

Thicket Biome

The Thicket Biome is the second-smallest biome in South Africa and is known for its high biodiversity. Subtropical thicket ranges from closed shrubland to low forest, dominated by evergreen succulent trees, shrubs and vines. It is often impenetrable and has little herbaceous cover. Roughly 20% of the species found there are endemic to the Thicket Biome.

The Thicket Biome, which is predominantly in the Eastern Cape, supports four species of tortoise: the leopard tortoise (Geochelone pardalis), angulate tortoise (Chersina angulata), tent tortoise (Psammobates tentorius) and parrot-beaked tortoise (Homopus areolatus).

Desert Biome

True desert is found under very harsh environmental conditions, which are even more extreme than those found in the Succulent Karoo and the Nama-Karoo biomes. The climate is characterised by summer rainfall, but also by high levels of summer aridity. Rainfall is highly variable from year-to-year. Desert is found mostly in Namibia, although it does occur in South Africa in the lower Orange River Valley.

The vegetation of the Desert Biome is characterised by the dominance of annual plants (often annual grasses). This means that after a rare season of abundant rain, the desert plains can be covered with a sea of short annual grass, whereas in drier years, the plains appear bare, with annual plants persisting in the form of seeds. Perennial plants are usually encountered in specialised habitats associated with local concentrations of water from broad drainage lines or washes. Nearer the coast, coastal fog also governs the distribution of certain species commonly associated with the desert.

The Desert Biome incorporates abundant insect fauna, which includes many tenebrionid beetles, some of which can

use fog water. There are also various vertebrates, including reptiles, springbok, ostrich, gemsbok, snakes and geckos. Some areas in this biome are formally protected in the Richtersveld National Park.

International cooperation

Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME)

The BCLME is regarded as one of the richest ecosystems on Earth, with ecosystem goods and services estimated to be worth at least \$54.3 billion a year. Offshore oil and gas production, marine diamond mining, coastal tourism, commercial fishing and shipping are some of the most important industrial activities that take place in the region. The accord, signed in Angola, is a formal agreement between Angola, Namibia and South Africa that seeks to provide economic, environmental and social benefits for the three countries.

The Benguela Current Commission is a permanent intergovernmental organisation, with a mandate to promote the long-term conservation, protection, rehabilitation, enhancement and sustainable use of the BCLME. South Africa has signed several international conventions, treaties, protocols and other agreements supporting the principles of sustainable development including the:

- CBD (ratified in 1995); Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (South Africa became a party in 2003);
- Kyoto Protocol (signed in 2003);
- UNCCD; World Heritage Convention (ratified in 1997);
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) (ratified in 1975); and
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (acceded in 1991).

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change South Africa ratified the UNFCCC in 1997. The UNFCCC is aimed at:

- implementing urgent action, from 2013 to 2020, including the adoption of a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol and a number of institutional mechanisms such as the GCF;
- acknowledging the inadequate commitments to reduce emissions made thus far; a work programme was agreed

- upon to increase pre-2020 levels of ambition; and
- action for the future with the negotiation of a legal agreement for the period beyond 2020.

The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994. The COP to the UNFCCC meets annually to assess progress in addressing climate change. The COP is the supreme body of the convention and is its highest decision-making authority. With 195 parties, the UNFCCC has near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The Kyoto Protocol has been ratified by 193 of the UNFCCC parties. Under the protocol, 37 states, consisting of highly industrialised countries and those making the transition to a market economy, have legally binding emission limitation and reduction commitments. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilise GHG concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

The launch of negotiations to shape the new global climate change agreement and first discussions on how to raise ambition took place at the UNFCCC in Bonn, Germany, in May 2012, which prepared decisions for adoption at the UNFCCC in Qatar later in 2012.

South Africa, through the DFFE, participated in the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC) between 30 November 2023 and 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. COP28 provided a key platform for both progress on negotiation issues under the UNFCCC, as well as for broader conversations, including on the need for transformation of the global financial architecture.

COP28 took place at a time when all regions of the world were facing challenges posed by a rapidly changing climate and the best available science was informing policy makers on the risks and potential solutions. It was also a period of increased geopolitical tensions, trade disputes and divisions amongst parties on issues such as carbon border taxes, particularly between developed and developing countries. Many countries were facing resource constraints that hindered their ability to take decisive climate action and developed countries continued to backtrack on their

commitments and to try to reframe the nature of climate finance. South Africa's vision was to deliver on the pillars of the Paris Agreement and focused on specific action on four paradigm shifts: fast-tracking the energy transition and slashing emissions before 2030; transforming climate finance by delivering on old promises and setting the framework for a new deal on finance; putting nature, people, lives and livelihoods at the heart of climate action and mobilising for the most inclusive COP ever.

The COP28 decision recognises different theme areas for adaptation action, and it has measurable targets that are time-bound. It also recognises the importance of securing adequate public finance for adaptation from developed countries. South Africa welcomed the decisions on the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, Just Transition Pathways Work Programme, the Mitigation Work Programme and the Global Goal on Adaptation. These decisions are in line with our national framework on Just Transition, in particular the recognition of a country's right to pursue its climate resilience path in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The conference aimed to accelerate global climate action and implement the Paris Agreement. This aligns with the general objectives of COP meetings, which focus on international co-operation to combat climate change.

The themes highlighted for COP28 included:

- Transitioning away from fossil fuels towards clean energy;
- Scaling up climate finance, especially for developing countries;
- Enhancing adaptation and resilience to climate impacts; and
- Nature-based solutions and protecting biodiversity.

These themes are consistent with the discussions and priorities set forth in various COP sessions, particularly given the increasing urgency surrounding climate change.

Key outcomes from COP28 included:

1. Adoption of the UAE Consensus, which called for a just transition away from fossil fuels.
2. Operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, with initial pledges exceeding \$700 million.

3. Commitment to triple global renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency improvements by 2030.
4. Agreement to scale up climate finance, urging developed countries to exceed the \$100 billion annual target.
5. Recognition of the need for a just transition addressing social and economic impacts on workers and communities.

UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)

The UN CSD was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit. From its inception, the CSD was highly participatory in structure and outlook by engaging in its formal proceedings a wide range of official stakeholders and partners through innovative formulae.

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

South Africa was a founding member of the CITES treaty, which was adopted on 3 March 1973, but only came into force on 1 July 1975. Signed by 149 countries, CITES is an international agreement between governments to protect endangered species against overexploitation through regulations regarding imports and exports and, in some cases, prohibiting trade.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of the IUCN. CITES accords varying degrees of protection to more than 30 000 animal and plant species, whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats or dried herbs. The DFFE, SANBI, the Scientific Authority and provincial authorities are working together to ensure full compliance with decisions taken at the 17th Conference of Parties to CITES.

These include identifying and implementing protocols for the registration of over 1 000 facilities for breeding captive-bred parrots; strengthening the monitoring of leopard populations to improve science-based decision-making; and initiating a research project to understand how trade in lion bone may impact wild lion populations. Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer International

Ozone Day is an annual event that commemorates the date of the signing of the Montreal Protocol in 1987. South Africa, which became a signatory to the Montreal Protocol in 1990, has phased out chlorofluorocarbons, halons, methyl chloroform and carbon tetrachloride.

International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer

The ozone layer, a fragile shield of gas, protects the Earth from the harmful portion of the rays of the sun, thus helping preserve life on the planet. The International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer is commemorated annually on 16 September.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

At the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, held in September 2015, world leaders adopted 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next 15 years, with these new goals that universally apply to all, countries would mobilise efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. The SDGs build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty.

The goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle income, to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.

UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

Rio+20 refers to the UN Conference on Sustainable Development that took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012. The meeting took place 20 years after the landmark 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, when more than 108 heads of state agreed to work together to develop national strategies to reduce carbon emissions, stabilise GHG, protect forests from destruction, and pay for their share of the damage caused to the Earth through pollution.

At the Rio+20 talks, 50 of the 193-member states of the UN launched new energy strategies, and private investors pledged more than \$50 billion to carry out the goal of doubling the share of global renewable energy and the rate of energy efficiency improvement by 2030.

