

Working for Wetlands

Strategy 2006 - 2010



1. Background

South African legislation defines wetlands as areas transitional between true aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Wetlands fall within the sphere of interest of several government departments.

This means that close co-operation is essential if they are to be managed correctly, avoiding what has taken place in many parts of the world where wetlands have tended to 'fall between the cracks'.

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Many wetlands have been destroyed or degraded, despite the clear benefits people derive from them. As a water-poor country, South Africa has reason to be concerned. Of all its ecosystems, freshwater ones are under most pressure as a result of poor land and water management and development within catchment areas.

The consequences of large-scale wetland loss include:

- reduced food security
- reduction in biodiversity
- increased vulnerability to natural disasters, such as droughts and floods
- lost livelihoods, and
- diminished water security.

By 2025, South Africa will be one of 14 African countries classified as subject to water scarcity, with less than 1000 m³ per person per year. Yet wetlands, which have a crucial part to play in water resource management, continue to be destroyed.

There has been some good news for wetlands in South Africa. This includes progressive policies in the agriculture, water and development sectors, the recognition that effective action requires a co-ordinated effort by government, and the establishment of Working for Wetlands, as a vehicle through which government can pursue its wetland-related objectives in a coherent and co-ordinated way.

About the programme


Working for Wetlands matches the imperative to rehabilitate wetlands with the need to create employment and alleviate poverty through public works. In four years – first as a sub-programme of Working for Water, and then as a stand-alone Department of Environment Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) programme – Working for Wetlands has proved its worth.

However, to improve its future effectiveness, Working for Wetlands is moving beyond rehabilitation to activities such as education and advocacy, and measures to protect and promote the sustainable use of targeted wetlands.

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As a programme Working for Wetlands does not exist in isolation. It is an expression of the objectives of several government departments, assisting them to co-ordinate efforts and resources in support of South Africa's wetlands.





The purpose of this document

This strategic document presents seven key focus areas that will enable Working for Wetlands to achieve healthy wetlands by championing the protection, rehabilitation and sustainable use of wetlands through co-operative governance and partnerships. It has been compiled after extensive research, workshops with key stakeholders in all nine provinces and nationally, as well as interviews with representatives of government departments.



Our goal

‘Healthy wetlands that benefit the people of South Africa and the environment that sustains us.’

Our purpose

‘The purpose of Working for Wetlands is to champion the protection, rehabilitation, and sustainable use of South Africa’s wetlands through co-operative governance and partnerships.’

2. Strategic Objectives

KEY FOCUS AREA 1: Mandate and corporate governance



Three strategic objectives have been identified to ensure that Working for Wetlands fulfils its mandate, has effective governance and is properly accountable to its parent departments and partners.

The programme is mandated under the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in terms of sections of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act to undertake activities that include rehabilitating and protecting wetlands. There are three national partners – the departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), and Agriculture (DoA). The focus area looks at how best to co-ordinate and manage the interaction between Working for Wetlands and its partners and stakeholders to achieve its mandate and maximise the benefits for wetlands.

KEY FOCUS AREA 2: Programme management



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For Working for Wetlands to make a difference it requires effective management structures and monitoring systems, and a functional organisational structure tailored to plan and execute all the activities required by business plans.

Working for Wetlands also needs to expand the programme's capacity to deliver additional services and products. An important aspect is the effective planning, implementation and monitoring of projects and, because there are more wetlands requiring more attention than a single programme can deal with, a system of prioritising, planning and implementing projects will ensure the greatest return on investment within the budget available to the programme.

Sources of extra funding, beyond the Expanded Public Works Programme, will be explored.

KEY FOCUS AREA 3: Stakeholder engagement & communication



Working for Wetlands has identified the need for stakeholder engagement and communication to promote the rehabilitation, protection and sustainable use of wetlands through:

- advocacy
- capacity building and extension
- communication
- media interaction, and
- branding the programme

Activities will be aimed at raising public awareness and achieving education and social change around wetlands. The programme aims to change the behaviour that leads to wetland degradation and influence the practices of people who regularly interact with wetlands. This recognises that the behaviour of people, rather than engineering solutions, is the key to healthy, sustainable wetlands.



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Given the many departments and other stakeholders that play a part, building meaningful relationships through communication and engagement is critical. Ways will be found to involve stakeholders, including providing support from within the programme.

For a select group of stakeholders – those groups that have the greatest impact on wetlands – advocacy programmes will encourage a change in mindset. This includes active involvement in law reform and policy development and creating a market for wetland rehabilitation beyond the programme's projects.

Flowing from workshops, the need to support wetland management capacity in public-sector structures was identified. Attention will also be given to supporting forums and committees that ensure co-operation between role players in wetland management.

KEY FOCUS AREA 4: Knowledge management



An important strategic objective is to develop a knowledge management system to support action for healthy wetlands. This includes acquiring and sharing information, knowledge and tools, such as a national wetlands inventory. This should engage stakeholders and

ensure that information reaches the right people in an accessible form. A key element is a user-friendly electronic information portal to provide access and links to information and research and to provide a forum for communication. This would assist with organising and making accessible the wealth of existing information.

Working for Wetlands is also in an ideal position to advocate wetlands-related research, including identifying needs, facilitating funding and offering support. An advantage is the programme's strong partnership with the Water Research Commission.

KEY FOCUS AREA 5: Wetland protection



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The objective is to promote protection of targeted wetlands and the ecosystem services they provide. While Working for Wetlands has concentrated on rehabilitating degraded wetlands it is important to also focus on

preventing the loss of further wetlands. The approach needs to be explored further, but the outcome is clear: a co-ordinated approach aimed at showing the benefits and techniques of wetland protection and growing participation in proactive wetland management.

Some proposed activities include pilot projects; identifying priority wetlands and encouraging other agencies, such as conservation bodies, to protect them; and supplying information to planning and decision-making bodies to ensure that wetlands are adequately protected.

KEY FOCUS AREA 6: Wetland rehabilitation



The objective is to implement wetland rehabilitation action to generate ecological, hydrological and social benefits. To date this has been a reactive process of erecting structures to control, for example, erosion. Now the programme will take a broader

approach to rehabilitate wetlands from an ecosystem and catchment perspective. This includes addressing issues of the long-term sustainability of rehabilitation projects – concentrating on wetlands that are part of wider initiatives, community and landowner education, and contractual arrangements with landowners. It is also important to develop and implement management plans for the long-term monitoring of rehabilitated wetlands, to develop tools, standards and techniques for wetland rehabilitation and to ensure that education and awareness creation are included in rehabilitation projects.

KEY FOCUS AREA 7: Promoting the sustainable use of wetlands



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Wetlands have the potential to provide resources for local economic development, such as the harvesting of reeds for thatching or basket-making, aquaculture and tourism. In the

past, many such projects have not been well planned and have either not produced economic returns or have degraded wetlands.

Working for Wetlands has a role to play in highlighting the links and interdependence between wetlands and people, showing how sustainable use can benefit the health and wellbeing of people and the ecosystem, providing advice and information through pilot projects, and facilitating links with local economic development initiatives. Preference will be given to sustainable use projects linked to existing rehabilitation projects.

CONCLUSION

Directly or indirectly, everyone depends on wetlands.

To stem their loss and maintain and enhance the benefits they provide, government recognises that strategies for wetland conservation must combine proactive measures to maintain healthy wetlands with interventions to rehabilitate those that are degraded. These objectives are expressed in a co-ordinated and innovative way through Working for Wetlands

Through its managed network model of operating, SANBI is ideally placed to secure collaboration to support the outcomes identified by all the partners in

Working for Wetlands. Recognising the ability of SANBI to play this cross-cutting and integrating role, the Biodiversity Act confers on the Institute a mandate to co-ordinate and implement programmes for the rehabilitation of ecosystems, with the involvement of civil society. This allows SANBI to integrate Expanded Public Works Programme approaches within a broader set of activities related to the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. This promotes an ecosystem approach that does not pursue rehabilitation in isolation of other activities, and strengthens the sustainability of interventions undertaken through Working for Wetlands.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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