

SA releases third biodiversity report

Environment, forestry and fisheries minister Barbara Creecy recently launched the third National Biodiversity Assessment (NBA), which is a scientific reflection of the state of the country's biodiversity. The NBA took five years to complete and involved nearly 480 South African scientists, many of them emerging scientists.



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Creecy launched the NBA at the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) in Tshwane on Thursday, 3 October. The assessment evaluates progress and shortcomings in conservation and ecosystem management on both land and sea. The study, led by SANBI, found that major pressures on South Africa's biodiversity are habitat loss, changes to freshwater flow, overuse of some species, pollution, climate change and invasive alien species.

"The study will be a valuable tool for the environment sector, government, civil society and the scientific community to inform policy, planning and decision-making on the wise use of the country's biodiversity assets and the management and restoration of ecological infrastructure," Creecy said.

Report's main findings

Highlighting the report's five main findings, the minister said the good news is significant success was recorded in assessing and protecting South Africa's biodiversity, maintaining the country as one of 17 megadiverse nations that has plant and marine species found nowhere else on Earth.

The second major finding confirmed the strategic significance of biodiversity-related employment, noting that approximately 418,000 jobs are biodiversity-related.

This compared favourably with the mining sector, which sustained approximately 430,000 jobs in 2017. Many of the biodiversity-related jobs were in rural areas where employment alternatives are limited.

Creecy said although the report found that South Africa's protected areas are generally providing good protection for species, with the majority of species of birds, reptiles, amphibians, plants, butterflies and mammals protected, animal and plant species are under threat.

The NBA revealed that 36 South African plant species are already confirmed extinct, a further 70 possibly extinct and 14% of all plant species threatened with extinction. Of the 2,911 animals assessed, a total of 12% are categorised as threatened with extinction.

Vulnerable freshwater resources

"The most concerning of the report's findings relate to our freshwater ecosystems, rivers, wetlands, estuaries and freshwater fish stocks. These are the most vulnerable of all species groups and the most threatened ecosystems in South Africa.

"In a water-stressed country such as ours, these findings are cause for serious concern. The restoration and protection of these fresh water eco-systems, or what we term eco-infrastructure services, will deliver huge returns on investment with great benefit to the communities that depend on them," the minister said.

The information in the report will not only feed into policies such as the National Biodiversity Framework and the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy, but also assist in the country's international reporting obligations – such as the state of environment reporting and the Convention on Biological Diversity Country Report.

It will also improve targeting of the department's already extensive programme to rehabilitate rivers, estuaries and wetlands.

"Armed with the scientific evidence from this report, we will now be able to take further action to protect and monitor the effectiveness of interventions in our most important eco-infrastructure and water catchment areas," the minister said.

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