

Johni Steenkamp : Pro-recycling is an untapped job-creator that must be explored

Minister, it is time that South Africa rethinks our horrific approach to waste disposal. Our landfill sites are truly in a state. They are overflowing and not regulated properly, if at all.

It is time that we adopt and nourish a pro-recycling mind-set within our society and starve our bloated landfills.

A great start, would be the example of a wonderful little town right here in the Western Cape, called Greyton. Last year Greyton phased out single use plastic shopping bags.

Due to their ability to become airborne, plastic bags have led to a multitude of problems across the country, including littering the streets, being ingested by livestock and leaking toxins into the environment.

They are also a significant threat to marine life and have wreaked havoc on our coastline's ecosystem. Every year it's estimated that millions of marine creatures suffer from plastic ingestion or entrapment.

Minister, there is also a need to educate our citizens and to incentivise recycling in SA, but that is not enough.

The government needs to set an example by pursuing and implementing innovative recycling practices and sustainable energy-related policies and programmes.

For instance, one of our international trade partners, Sweden's waste-to-energy program, generates 20% of the nation's district heating and generates electricity for a quarter-million homes.

The Scandinavian country has actually run out of waste, and now has gone into 'trash for cash' partnerships with neighbouring countries such as Norway.

Considering our electricity crisis and overflowing landfill sites, this could be the perfect solution to help both problems currently plaguing South Africa, Minister.

I implore you, your department and colleagues in the Energy Portfolio to heed my words and consider this proposal – if not for your sake, then for the sake of a sustainable future for our nation.

Terri Stander: Failing government environmental initiatives a grave threat to our natural heritage

After 21 years our democracy is led by a broken man and crippled by a perpetual system of insiders and outsiders. The Western border along the Kruger National Park is a perfect depiction of this inequality.

These poor communities are suppressed by poor service delivery, stifled by the lack of quality education or meaningful employment and subjected to crime; or turn to crimes like poaching because they haven't had the freedom, fairness or opportunity to better their lives.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has failed to implement immigration controls that prevent the influx of undocumented foreign nationals along the South Western border of the Kruger National Park where the majority of poaching incidents now originate.

The Ministry of Defence and Police have failed to secure South Africa's borders, or so much as a cross-border hot pursuit agreement, to foil the daily armed insurgences on the sovereignty of our state and butchering of our natural heritage.

The South African Revenue Service has failed to adequately implement customs controls at points of entry permitting the free trafficking of illegal wildlife and plant specimens abroad.

The State Security Agency has failed to gather and coordinate actionable intelligence to disrupt organised crime syndicates that manipulate the supply and demand of illegal flora and fauna.

The Ministry of Justice has failed to legislate strict penalties or capacitate their courts with sufficient skilled Magistrates to deter environmental crime.

The Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries has failed to develop norms and standards for threatened and protected species while they play ping pong with the Department of Environmental Affairs deflecting their responsibility.

The Ministry of Economic Development has failed to initiate employment opportunities in poor communities that would provide an alternative to poaching activities.

The Ministry of Environmental Affairs has failed to adequately include adjacent communities in conservation through beneficiation schemes and increased access to the very Parks that belong to them. Further, it has failed to focus on essential international demand reduction campaigns – the ultimate solution to the poaching crisis.

Rhino are not more important than people, nor is rhino poaching more important than critical issues of poor service delivery, poor education, unemployment, corruption or crime.

It is the failure of this ANC Government to uphold the rule of law and ensure good governance that means our people risk their lives on a daily basis: either to protect our natural heritage, or to pilfer it from the rest of us.

Minister Molewa, the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species will not lift the ban on trade in rhino horn next year in March. Your rhino trade committee is perpetuating debate that is polarising our country, dividing our efforts and wasting crucial time to save this iconic species.

It is shameful that the ANC is endorsing an illegal activity as a quick win for its own Government's failures.

We need to stop feeding off ANC lip service and window dressing.

Botswana, Swaziland and other countries all successfully protect their rhino because they have the political will. Apho kukho injongo, kukho indlela. Find the will and South Africans will always find a way.

Thomas Hadebe: DEA's dereliction of duty endangering SA

Honourable Chairperson,
Honorable members and the South Africans,
Greetings.

Minister, your department has made a positive effort to draft policies and legislation to conserve and protect the environment. However, significant challenges still remain.

This is largely due to the lack of capacity in enforcing compliance of the policies and legislation in local and provincial spheres of government.

For instance the degradation of our ocean and estuaries continues unabated and the government, particularly your department, Minister, and the Department of Fisheries has all but turned a blind eye to it.

Is that because the poor communities that are most dependent on ocean resources lack power and influence, or that the ocean species that are near extinction do not vote?

Honourable Chairperson, let me narrate the story that was told by the community living along the Swartkop River in Port Elizabeth during my oversight visit earlier this year.

I learned from the community that the ocean and coast of the city were once a beautiful place for families to visit, swim and fish. They were an economic powerhouse, contributing millions to the region's gross domestic product and thousands of jobs.

But today this ocean faces growing challenges, from pollution to loss of habitat and sometimes competing industrial uses.

This is a result of the Nelson Mandela bay Municipality's failure to operate and maintain their infrastructure in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

With complete disregard, the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality has allowed millions of litres of sewage spewed into the river.

The failure of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro Municipality in this regard has led to rapid deterioration of the estuary and ocean environment followed by a drop in the aquatic population of the area.

As a result there has been a decrease in the number of tourists and local employment which currently sits at 36.6%.

This shows how the national discourse and strategies become entangled with other spheres of government, and thus hampering implementation on the grassroots levels where it matters most.

To put it quite simply this has been a dereliction of duty on the municipality's part.

There is an urgent need to identify areas that are appropriate for use and those that need protection. This will ensure estuaries are protected so that we secure a healthy, unpolluted ocean for generations to come.

I would like to quote the former state President Tata Nelson Mandela during the state of nation address on the 24th May 1994.

"I am especially pleased that we have a ministry dedicated to the issue of the environment. Its work must impact on many aspects of national activity and address the question of the well-being of society as a whole and the preservation of a healthy environmental future even for generation not yet born."

Honourable Chairperson, we must be keepers of this legacy.

Guided by these noble principles once more, we can face the challenges and triumph by making the decision to put the environment first.

In upholding these noble principles, the DA calls for Minister Molewa to reverse her decision to grant postponements for compliance with the Minimum Emission Standards in declared priority areas. Granting these postponements is not just a matter of law but has real and adverse effects on the health and well-being of the people in the communities surrounding these areas.

The Air Quality Act states that postponements may only be granted if there is compliance with current national ambient air quality standards.

Twenty three of the approved applications for postponement that were granted did not comply with current national ambient air quality standards, and were therefore granted unlawfully.

This means that the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has knowingly and willfully put the health of many South Africans at risk.

The DEA cannot ignore the human cost in terms of environmental degradation and health inflictions suffered by South Africans as a result of these postponements. Research attributes premature death, and the deterioration of our climate and ecosystems to air pollution.

With South Africa having one of the highest per capita emissions rates in the world, and in light of international emission agreements, we would have expected that the air quality provisions would have been stringently adhered to.

Each application for postponement should have included a credible health impact assessment and offset plan before it was approved.

The DEA only requires offset plans by April 2016 with no indication of how these will be enforced.

Mass polluters cannot continue to use our citizens as a pollution filter.

The Department has a Constitutional mandate to provide an environment that is not harmful to people's lives – not to make excuses on behalf of polluters.

Minister, you must act without delay

