

BUDGET VOTES

Vote 32: Environment, Forestry and Fisheries

Hon. N Singh, MP

23 July 2020

Honourable Chairperson,

As a country we have witnessed both the positive and negative indirect environmental effects as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown measures and restrictions that have been imposed in South Africa since the 26th March of this year.

'Lockdown' has resulted in a significant improvement of our air, terrestrial and marine environments, as result of the reduction in both economic activity and access restrictions. If I may be so bold as to paraphrase the Hon. President, and from a purely environmental perspective, "We should not be letting a good crisis go to waste in this respect!"

So what have learnt from the virus? We have learnt that wet markets are breeding pools for zoonotic diseases and must therefore be under the most stringent of regulations, so as to ensure human health and safety, and reduce the risk of localised outbreaks of further zoonotic diseases.

Questions have also been asked around the safety in this regard of the very contentious lion bone trade, which to my mind, and from my own personal investigation into the rationale by government to permit this type of trade, still escapes me.

If we look at the current Covid-19 scenario, we note studies conducted that have shown that lions can carry Feline Coronavirus2, FIV (the cat equivalent of HIV – feline immunodeficiency virus), and even more concerning, bovine tuberculosis (which can be passed to humans and has been identified as a growing threat). Yet this country does not have the regulatory control or enforcement capacity to manage the zoonotic risks associated with trade in such high-risk species. So the question remains, why are we allowing such trade?

A recent question posed to the High Level Panel by Dr Simon Morgan asked the question, "*Does South Africa really want to risk being the centre of future Zoonotic outbreaks?*" and then supplied the only appropriate answer "*We need to be seen to take decisive action in this regard, and the only way we can do so is to shut it down*".

Is this being given due consideration, Honourable Minister? The IFP would most certainly support such steps.

Chairperson, SanParks have been closed during this period and lost the associated revenue derived from tourists visiting our National Parks. *R961 million was transferred from Programme 6 (Environmental Programmes) to the South African National Parks (SANParks) to ensure that 4 158 jobs were saved in SANParks and 20 National Parks; 4.3 million hectares of South Africa's conservation estate and 3697km² of Marine*

Protected Areas were effectively protected, which is laudable. But importantly, have we also utilised this time to strengthen security and anti-poaching measures at our National Parks?

We commend you that regulatory compliance and enforcement activities have been reprioritised to ensure that they are not compromised and are more targeted, for example, only last week rhino horn worth R100 million was seized at OR Tambo Airport, disguised as artwork and destined for Kuala Lumpur.

But is enough being done?

Chairperson, two years after an unambiguous resolution of the National Assembly to ***introduce legislation with a view to shutting down*** the captive lion industry, the Minister has failed to do so, and has instead appointed a High Level Panel to review the management of lions, elephants, rhinos and leopards. By ignoring extensive scientific reports on the management of these animals - including the Report on Selective and Intensive Breeding by the department's own task team - the appointment of the Panel appears to be *prima facie* nothing but a duplication of work, constituting fruitless and wasteful expenditure. Should we not be cutting costs here?

In conclusion we trust that the DEFF will still do all within its power to meet its stated mandate: ensuring the protection of the environment and conservation of natural resources, balanced with sustainable development and the equitable distribution of the benefits derived from natural resources for current and future generations.

The IFP will support the adjusted budget vote debate on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries.

I thank you.

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