**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2059 / NW 2280E**

**MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND FISHERIES:**

**Inkosi R N Cebekhulu (IFP) to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:**

**QUESTION:**

(a) What has her department done and what measures were taken to rehabilitate forests that are woodlands and indigenous forests and (b) support small forest growers?        **NW2280E**

**REPLY:**

1. **Rehabilitation and measures taken to restore degraded declared woodlands and state indigenous forest**

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries rehabilitates degraded State Indigenous Forests. Note may be taken of the report that entails the work done on rehabilitation of degraded State Indigenous Forest over the past three financial years (2014/2015, 2015/2016, 2016/2017), which focused on clearing of alien invasive plants and planting of trees in some areas. This activity is embedded in Outcome 10, Output 3 (Sustainable Environmental Management), sub output 3.2 (Restoration & rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems). Activities were undertaken between 2014 and 2017 in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | Activity | Actual achievement |
| 2014/2015 | Alien clearing/ planting | 591.2329 ha |
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|  |
| 2015/2016 | Alien clearing/ planting | 302.6462 ha |
|  |
|  |
| 2016/2017 | Alien clearing/ planting | 300.287 ha |
|  |
| Total | 1 194 166 ha | |
| For noting | The considerable abolishment of posts and budget cuts led to a reduction in the hectares of areas rehabilitated over the last three years. | |

Furthermore, State Indigenous Forests were assessed for signs of forest deforestation and degradation due to inter alia illegal activities, unstainable use and natural forces/influences. During this period, focus was on the condition of forest canopy, margins, under-storey and shrub-layer. The identified degraded and deforested forests were subsequently included in the rehabilitations plans. Moreover, remedial measures to address illegal activities are planned and incorporated into Forest Protection Plans. State Indigenous Forests were monitored for the presence of Rare, Threatened and Endangered (RTE) species. The sighted species were recorded and included in the Forest Biodiversity Management Plans with explicit prescriptions. The work on degraded declared woodlands has not started due to financial constraints.

**(2)   Support for small forest growers**

In order to intervene in the challenges faced by small growers in obtaining the afforestation licences, the Department has put in place a number of interventions that will result in solutions for the sector.

Opportunities for expansion of forestry plantations exist in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. These are the provinces where most of the small growers are concentrated including Mpumalanga and few in Limpopo.

For afforestation to take place, potential developers and small growers require an afforestation license issued by the Department of Water and Sanitation. In addition to the Water requirements, there is a need to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) issued by the Department of Environmental Affairs. The process and time it takes to issue licenses have been identified as critical areas that need to be addressed in order to enable small growers to establish their plantations.

The Department started with conducting afforestation potential studies in all provinces except the Western Cape (due to the decommissioning decision that was taken by Cabinet). The results were that 39 000 hectares (ha) was possible in KwaZulu-Natal and 100 000 ha in the Eastern Cape may be afforested.

To further streamline afforestation, a study was commissioned in the 2011/12 financial year to undertake EIAs for an area of 13000ha in the Eastern Cape which resulted in Records of Decision issued for an area of 10 500ha.This resulted in an area of about 5 000 ha being planted. In the current financial year, the Department will complete EIAs for 5000 ha in KwaZulu-Natal leading to increased afforestation.

In addition to the support given in the Afforestation Programme, the Department has undertaken the following initiatives:

* Discussions with the Department of Water and Sanitation regarding exemption of growers from paying water tariffs. Growers with a planted area of less than 10 hectares have since been exempted from paying water tariffs. Those with plantations between 10 and 100 ha will have a phased in payment provision where they will reach 100 % of the total costs in year five of their operations have commenced.
* The Department is engaging with industry on Forestry Development Protocols that will ensure honest brokering and the leveling of power relations between small growers and established corporates.
* The Department developed guidelines for supporting growers through Advisory Services in the provinces. These guidelines are available in English, Sepedi, Tshivenda, isiZulu, and isiXhosa.
* The Department has just finalised the Agroforestry Strategy with an Implementation Plan. It will be piloted in this current financial year in Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal. The strategy is aimed at promoting multiple land use thereby addressing issues of household food security for growers who have to wait for a longer period of time before harvesting their plantations.