

**Ref:02/1/5/2**

**MINISTER**

**QUESTION NO. 718 FOR WRITTEN REPLY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

A draft reply to **Ms D Carter (Cope)** to the above-mentioned question is enclosed for your consideration.

**MS NOSIPHO NGCABA**

**DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

**DATE:**

**DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED**

**MRS B E E MOLEWA, MP**

**MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**DATE:**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**(For written reply)**

**QUESTION NO. 718 {NW833E}**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 8 of 2016**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION: 11 March 2016**

**Ms D Carter (Cope) to ask the Minister of Environmental Affairs:**

Whether Durban or any other city in the country is regarded as an environmental hotspot on account of (a) a lack of proper and adequate sanitation, (b) overexploitation and depletion of natural resources, (c) soil or beach erosion of one type or the other, (d) diminishing water availability and compromised water quality and (e) destruction of highly prized and unique eco-systems; if not, why not; if so, (i) which cities are regarded as environmental hotspots in respect of the aforementioned, (ii) what steps has the Government taken to address the specified problems proactively and aggressively in order to remedy the situation and (iii) what measure of success is being achieved in rectifying the specified problems?

NW833E

**718. THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPLIES:**

(a)

This needs to be responded to by the Department of Water and Sanitation.

(b) (i), (ii) and (iii)

Yes.

All cities can be considered environmental hotspots simply due to the density of people – this shear density of humanity means that cities are huge sinks for food, water, energy and other natural resources as well as being significant sources of waste, effluent, heat and atmospheric emissions (often mostly vehicle emissions). Nevertheless, in the Western and Eastern coastal regions of the South African ocean space, abalone and rock lobster are currently over-exploited and showing signs of depletion.

With this, it is estimated that over 50% of the world’s population now lives in cities and urban areas. These large communities provide both challenges and opportunities for environmentally-conscious developers, and there are distinct advantages to further defining and working towards the goals of sustainable cities. Humans are social creatures and thrive in urban spaces that foster social connections. Because of this, a shift to denser, urban living provides an outlet for social interaction and conditions under which humans can prosper. Thus, contrary to popular belief cities can be more environmentally sustainable than rural or suburban living. With people and resource located so close to one another, it is possible to save energy for transportation and mass transit systems, and resources such as food.

Operation Phakisa led by the Department of Environmental Affairs has key focus areas on Marine Protection Services and Governance that include key initiatives addressing over-exploitation and depletion of natural resources or marine living species. These include a network of 22 of Marine Protected Areas and Coordinated enforcement programmes.

The monitoring and evaluation of local authorities’ performance is the mandate of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA).

(c) (i), (ii) and (iii)

Yes

The South African coastline currently has areas that are prone to soil and beach erosion, and these include Glentana, Oyster Bay, St Francis Bay, Langebaan and Milnerton. The Department of Environmental Affairs however, is in the process of conducting a National Coastal Assessment which will identify such hotspots.

(d) (i), (ii) and (iii)

Yes

Coastal cities by their nature are potential environmental hotspots with respect to water quality. As an example, some of recreational beaches in Durban have lost their Blue Flag status due to poor water quality. The department has tools whose aim is to assist the municipalities to better manage water quality.

(e) (i), (ii) and (iii)

Yes

All cities contain highly prized ecosystems which are eroded on account of the pressing needs of ever expanding cities to provide for housing and other land uses. However, most of the more advanced metropolitan areas and bigger cities entertain these pressures through proper land use planning. Conservation plans and other tools are in place to indicate where the environmental hotspots are located. Planning of infrastructure is taking these hotspots into consideration. Designing these cities consider environmental impacts and is dedicated to the minimization of the required inputs of energy, water and food, waste output and water pollution.

A number of conservation and legislative tools to ensure conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity have been developed and these include:

* Bioregional Plans developed in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004). Bioregional Plans provide for integrated and coordinated biodiversity planning to ensure the monitoring of the conservation status of various components of South Africa’s biodiversity and promote biodiversity research. A number of Bioregional Plans exist such as in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan (Eastern Cape Province), the City of Cape Town (Western Cape Province), the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan and the West Rand District Municipality (Gauteng Province), the City of Tshwane (Gauteng Province), the Gert Sibanda (Mpumalanga Province) as well as the draft Bioregional Plan for the Waterberg District (Limpopo Province).
* Biodiversity Management Plans for ecosystems are also made provision for in terms of the Biodiversity Act. These plans can be developed by any person, organisation or organ of state and are intended to ensure the long term persistence of an ecosystem that is of special concern. Management interventions put in place for landowners, resource users and other key stakeholders can impact positively on the functioning of the particular ecosystem. The department is in the process of developing the first Biodiversity Management Plan for an ecosystem which will be addressing threats to the Colbyn Valley Wetland and its associated sub-catchment (Hartebeesspruit River).

In addition to these biodiversity legislative tools, the government has taken steps towards local government support relating to the mainstreaming of environmental considerations into local government and such interventions undertaken include:

* The Environment Sector Local Government Support Strategy. The strategy which is being implemented mainstreams relevant environmental priorities into local government. This came about from a need for a more coordinated and structured mechanism of dealing with sustainable environmental management in local government. The objectives of the strategy are to: 
  + clarify the environmental sector mandate for local government support;
  + clarify the local government mandate for environmental management;
  + identify opportunities for streamlining and integrating the support initiatives of the environment sector with the local government development agenda;
  + identify gaps in cooperation with the local government sector;
  + rationalise municipal reporting requirements;
  + promote consistency and synergy in approach with provinces on local government support programmes (LGSPs); and
  + maximise the environmental sector’s relations with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) the South African Cities Network (SACN) and COGTA as representative organs of local government.

The implementation of the strategy is done through the establishment and regular convening of the Local Government Task Team.

Government has also developed the National Framework for Biodiversity Mainstreaming in Local Authorities which sets out biodiversity specific considerations that should be mainstreamed into Local Authorities. The development of this framework was conducted through a series of Local Authority stakeholder workshops. Government recognises the need to implement this framework, an important intervention to strengthen support to Local Authorities towards mainstreaming biodiversity in Local Government.

**In addition**

The department has developed a proposed Strategic Integrated Project (SIP) known as   
SIP 19: Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security. The proposed SIP 19 is the second water-related SIP and provides a framework for the integration of a number of impactful water-related ecological infrastructure investments and interventions into a coordinated, coherent and focused project specifically aimed at improving South Africa’s water resource quality and quantity. Thus, the purpose of SIP 19 is to make a significant contribution to the overall goal of ensuring a sustainable supply of fresh, healthy water to equitably meet South Africa’s social, economic and environmental water needs for current and future generations through the integrated implementation of projects within identified priority water catchments.

Although, the concept of ecological infrastructure is not very well known in traditional infrastructure sectors, the essential life-supporting and life-enhancing ecosystem goods and services that are generated by this infrastructure are universally experienced (for instance, nutrient dispersal and cycling; seed dispersal; food (such as seafood, fresh-water fish and game); crops; wild foods; spices; water; minerals; medicinal plants; pharmaceuticals; bio-chemicals; industrial products; energy (hydropower, biomass fuels); carbon sequestration and climate regulation; waste decomposition and detoxification; purification of water and air; crop pollination; pest and disease control; cultural, intellectual and spiritual inspiration; recreational experiences (including ecotourism) and scientific discovery).

Thus, as infrastructure is often broadly defined as the substructure or underlying foundation on which the continuance or growth of a community or state depends, similarly, ecological infrastructure is the networks of natural lands, working landscapes and other open spaces that are the substructure or underlying foundation on which the continuance or growth of ecosystem goods and services depends.

In terms of cities and the impact SIP 19 may have on cities like Durban, in recent years, a number of ecologists and economists have touted New York City's (NYC’s) efforts to preserve the Catskills watershed, one of three major basins from which the city obtains its water supply, as a key example of the benefits of effective watershed management.

New York City’s water supply system is still largely derived from surface water north of the metropolitan area with the Catskill and Delaware watersheds supplying 5.3 billion liters of safe, but unfiltered, drinking water to nearly half of the population. The reliable function and safety of this water supply was, and is, absolutely essential to the existence of NYC and is entirely based on the maintenance of ecological infrastructure. In terms of cost-effectiveness, although NYC invested $1.5 billion on watershed protection over 10 years they avoided at least $6 billion in capital costs and $300 million in annual operating costs if their ecological infrastructure was replaced by a traditional water treatment plant.

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