

**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 by the Department of Water and Sanitation

(b) The situation described below and under (a) is not applicable to Durban or any specific city but is in general applicable to most cities. Given their population density and sheer intensity of economic activity, cities are a major source of overexploitation and depletion of natural resources. As was noted in the recent OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050, the number of people living in cities will increase to around 6.4 billion by 2050, or approximately 70% of the total world population (OECD 2012).

Therefore all cities can be considered environmental hotspots– 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).

Loss of natural habitat is the biggest single cause of loss of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning in the terrestrial environment. Outright loss of natural habitat takes place mainly as a result of conversion of natural vegetation for necessary infrastructure development and urban development, which means that patterns of land use have a great impact on the health and functioning of terrestrial ecosystems, resulting in impacts on their ecological functioning and viability, particularly in the context of climate change.

Furthermore, waste generated by urban settlements generates water pollution, soil pollution and air pollution, impacting on ecosystems, species and ecological processes (National Biodiversity Assessment, 2011).

Nothwithstanding the above, Durban like any other city in South Africa is subject to environmental laws of the country. This city has a dedicated environmental and planning institutional arrangement that is meant to mitigate and manage potential environmental impacts. Part of their environmental vision, the eThekwini Metropolitan city, advocates for conserving biodiversity and the ecosystem goods and services.

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

The monitoring and evaluation of local authorities’ performance is the mandate of COGTA.

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

The Department is in the process of conducting a National Coastal Assessment which will identify such hotspots.

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

Coastal cities by their nature are potential environmental hotspots with respect to water quality. As an example, some of recreational beaches in Durban had lost their Blue Flag status due to poor water quality but have since regained this Blue Flag Status.

The Department has tools that aim to assist municipalities to better manage water quality.

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

All cities contain highly prized ecosystems, but continue to face pressing needs of ever expanding need 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 takes 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.

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