

Successful invasive plants eradication scheme outgrows R1bn budget

The South African Department of Environment Affairs' (DEA's) and the Department of Water Affairs' (DWA's) Working for Water (WfW) programme, which eradicates invasive alien plants (IAPs) in the country, has been dubbed a success since its inception.



However, Engineering News reports, in recent years, it seems that the programme has slowed down and is not delivering the same results it did under the late Kadar Asmal, who started the programme in 1995 in order to reduce IAPs - the single biggest threat to the country's biological biodiversity and water security. Since inception, the programme has cleared more than two-million hectares of invasive alien plants, providing jobs and training for more than 25 000 people a year from among the most marginalised sectors of society. Of these, 54% are women, the department states.

WfW's Dr Christo Marais tells Engineering News that, while the project enjoys exceptional support from Minister Edna Molewa, Deputy Minister Rejoice Mabudafhasi and Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, and even though its 1995 R25-million budget has grown to R1.1-billion for WfW and R383.5-million for Working on Fire in the 2012/13 financial year, "the estimated costs of controlling invasive plants, restoring degraded land, implementing an integrated veld and forest fire management programme and restoring and maintaining degraded wetlands and riparian [will cost about R57-billion], more than what government is currently investing, and this is a challenge that might hamper growth in industry."

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