

Parliament passes environmental bills

The National Assembly (NA) has passed the National Forests Amendment and the National Environmental Management Laws Amendment Bills. The bills were passed during a parliamentary plenary sitting on Tuesday, 1 March.



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The two pieces of legislation are among the bills, initially introduced during the fifth Parliament and revived in the sixth Parliament.

The bills were approved by the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) on 14 December 2021 and referred to the NA's Portfolio Committee on Environment, Forestry and Fisheries for further processing, in terms of Section 76 (1(c)) of the Constitution.



LEGISLATION & REGULATION

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Gary Moore 24 Feb 2022

The National Forests Amendment Bill

The National Forests Amendment Bill aims, among others, to amend the National Forests Act of 1998 to provide for precise definitions of forests and woodlands and the public ownership of these spaces to increase the promotion and enforcement of sustainable forest management, to control and remedy deforestation.

The approved essential amendments include the new definitions of "destruction of the natural forest" and "woodlands". The "destruction of the natural forest" is now defined as "any action where one or more trees in a natural forest are felled or caused to die, or the undergrowth removed, for land use or resource use".

"The new definition of 'woodlands' now means a group of indigenous trees which are not a natural forest, but whose crowns cover at least 5% of the area they occupy, and which may, in a degraded state have a crown cover of less than 5%. Further, any vegetation type declared by the Minister to be a woodland by notice in the Gazette," Parliament's spokesperson Moloto Mothapo said.



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The National Environmental Management Laws Amendment Bill

The National Environmental Management Laws Amendment Bill seeks to amend several provisions to clarify matters and textual amendments under various related Acts.

These include the National Environmental Management Act of 1998, the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act of 2003, the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act of 2004 and the National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act of 2004.

Mothapo said public consultation processes on the two bills were conducted extensively, and these included calls for written submissions and the facilitation of public hearings held by provincial legislatures.

The two bills will now be sent to President Cyril Ramaphosa for assent.

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