

PARLIAMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF THE WESTERN CAPE

ANNOUNCEMENTS, TABLINGS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

TUESDAY, 2 AUGUST 2022

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning on its oversight visit to the Southern Cape from 14 to 15 June 2022, as follows:

Delegation

The delegation consisted of the following members:

August, SN (GOOD)

Bosman, G (DA)

Marais, PJ (FF Plus)

Marran, P (ANC)

Van Der Westhuizen, AP (DA: Chairperson and leader of the delegation)

1. Introduction and background

Section 114 (2)(b)(i) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa mandates provincial legislatures to provide for mechanisms to maintain oversight over the Provincial Executive Authority in the province.

In August 2021, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning briefed the Committee on the rationale for a biomass economy. The strategic context and status of the Departmental biomass programmes were outlined that focused on various business models for Biochar, Activated Carbon and Wood Vinegar sourced from alien invasive plant clearing. The value chain and benefits regarding alien invasive plants as well as the market opportunities for the above-mentioned commodities were provided. In this regard the Department provided the Committee with an overview of the Karatara Catchment and Restore Eden Projects.

The Committee resolved that it would conduct an oversight visit to the Southern Cape to observe the progress and implementation of the Karatara Catchment Pilot Project and the

Restore Eden Programme (REP) as well as the effect of the Knysna fires and the progress made in reclaiming land by means of alien vegetation clearing which could possibly ensure a future supply of biomass for some of the Department's initiatives.

Similarly in August 2021 and subsequently in February 2022, the Committee was briefed by the Department of Agriculture on its Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme. Here the Department provided the Committee with an overview of the Programme that focused on subsistence and smallholder farmers. The Western Cape's contribution to national agricultural exports as well as the Western Cape's contribution to agricultural employment within the Province was highlighted. The support to and constraints experienced by smallholder and subsistence farmers as well as the challenges regarding land access, COVID-19 responses and the drought were outlined. The Department further outlined elements of certain disasters and constraints facing small holder and subsistence farmers.

The Committee then resolved that it would undertake an oversight visit to farms that have been enrolled in the Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme.

The afore-mentioned engagements and emanating resolutions informed the need for the oversight visit to the Southern Cape.

The Committee visited the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning's Biomass and Restore Eden Projects on Tuesday 14 June 2022. These sights spanned from Kurland to Plettenberg Bay, Harkerville, Knysna and Sedgfield.

The Committee visited two farms that were part of the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme as well as the Department's Outeniqua Research Farm on Wednesday 15 June 2022. The farms spanned from Waboomskraal to Herold within the George Municipal area.

This report highlights the Committee's findings and recommendations stemming from the visits.

2. Restore Eden and Biomass Projects: Tuesday 14 June 2022

2.1 Overview and background

The Restore Eden Programme (REP) was a public private partnership aiming to transform South Africa's Garden Route into a globally recognised social, economic and ecological system that ensured a better future for all within the region. It operated on a simple concept, i.e. Grow More Food. The current food distribution model was challenged through the Programme where free access food gardens for the community were installed and community members were taught how to easily grow food with little resources.

The visit commenced in Kurland Village with a briefing by the stakeholders involved in the REP. The Committee then proceeded to observe food gardens in the area and engaged with community members, private stakeholders, municipal mayors and officials as well as with the officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning.

The Committee then proceeded to the Native Roots Shelter for the homeless in Plettenberg Bay where REP micro-jobbing was implemented and then to the Timber Two Processors wood mill in Harkerville where alien invasive plant sleepers were prepared for export.

The Programme continued with a visit to the Forest View community near Harkerville to observe the expansion of the REP natural products and community food gardens in the area. This was followed by a visit to Knysna for a discussion and observation of slope stabilisation after the Knysna fires. The day concluded with a visit to Karatara near Sedgefield where the Karatara Biomass Pilot Project, as part of the Biomass Programme, was showcased. This Project produced biochar, activated carbon and wood vinegar from alien vegetation clearing.

In summary, the various projects visited are as follows:

- Kurland Village Project
- Native Roots Homeless Shelter
- Timber Two Processors wood mill
- Forest View community gardens
- Slope Stabilisation in Knysna
- Karatara Biomass Project

2.1.1 Findings and observations: Kurland Village Project

The Committee was impressed by this community driven initiative and by those volunteering to assist the community. The Project appeared to be highly effective and the Committee recognised the social value attached to the Project. The gardens were neat and it was evident that the community took great pride in what they had established. The Committee was also impressed by the number of food gardens that were found in the front and back yards of homes.

However, it was not clear how the youth in the area were involved or impacted by this Project as most of the residents that the Committee engaged with were older people. A number of open spaces were also observed and plans to utilise these spaces were unclear.

2.1.1.1 Request for information

2.1.1.1.1 The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture provides it with a list of the community food gardens in the Cape Metropolitan area versus the number of community food gardens in other areas of the Western Cape as well as the respective budgets for each area.

2.1.1.1.2 The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning provides it with a:

2.1.1.1.2.1 Report on the number of youth involved with the project and its impact on the youth; and

2.1.1.1.2.2 Information pertaining to the unused open spaces that were observed, indicating if there was the potential for establishing more food gardens.

2.1.2 Findings and observations: Native Roots Homeless Shelter

The Native Roots Homeless Shelter in Plettenberg Bay was a non-profit organisation funded by the Table Mountain Fund. The Shelter is part of the Siyalima Group that worked towards sustainable agriculture and biodiversity economies in order to build self-sufficient and healthy communities. It acted as a safe home, growing and selling products, promoting clean living, healthy plants, nutrient rich food and emotional support. It also played an important role in rehabilitating homeless people who were battling addiction. The Shelter actively promoted permaculture, natural composting and working with indigenous plants. The Committee was impressed by the extensive indigenous knowledge linked to the medicinal value of plants as well as the passion portrayed by the Project Director.

2.1.2.1 Recommendation

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Department of Agriculture contacts the Project Director to enquire what support is needed and/or lacking.

2.1.2.2 Resolutions

The Committee RESOLVED that it would:

- 2.1.2.2.1 Invite representatives from the University of the Western Cape to brief it on research underway in respect of the medicinal value of plants; and
- 2.1.2.2.2 Confer with the Standing Committee on Social Development to consider a visit to the Native Roots Homeless Shelter to observe the functioning of the shelter and the methodology employed for its success and also to give consideration to duplicating the methods used in similar non-governmental and governmental institutions.

2.1.2.3 Request for information

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture provides it with a list of non-governmental organisations that it has partnered with in the Western Cape as well as the respective cause attached to each.

2.1.3 Timber Two Processors Wood Mill

The Timber Two Processors Wood Mill in Harkerville was an independent community timber mill in partnership with the local Harkerville forestry-village community. The business harvests invasive alien species from private land owners and conducts restoration. It produced hardwood sleepers and quality planks from alien invasive plants. These products were exported to clients in the United Kingdom and Europe based on assurance that the products were harvested legally, that it was ecologically friendly and that it benefitted the community. Assurance was hampered by the use of eucalyptus, an alien invasive plant, in certain products.

Finance was needed to purchase the timber mill for the community and to expand delivery to the United Kingdom partners. The demand for timber products of this nature was very high. In order to do this the Timber mill required quality assurance on products. The Committee was pleased to be informed that the REP was in the process of establishing interim assurance while developing full certification.

The exportation of round logs was challenging as the sourcing of raw material plantations was difficult. The Timber Mill entered into a partnership with South African National Parks (Sanparks) who assisted with the monitoring and prioritisation of certain areas as well as landscaping the alien clearing layer.

The exportation of logs was of concern to the Committee as this could have a devastating effect on local job creation, climate change and biodiversity conservation.

2.1.3.1 Recommendations

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning:

- 2.1.3.1.1 Supports the owner of the Timber Mill by issuing him with a letter stating that eucalyptus is an alien invasive plant and that his use of this resource was not endangering the sustainability of the natural environment;
- 2.1.3.1.2 Liaises with Sanparks in respect of the logs going to waste; and
- 2.1.3.1.3 Engages with the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment in order to prevent the exportation of logs and investigate the possibility of a provincial and/or national ban.

2.1.4 Forest View Community

The Forest View Community Gardens Project was welcomed by the Committee. However, this Project lacked sustainable water sources for it to flourish. Sanparks indicated that it would assist with the harvesting of water but also indicated that it would require support from the local municipality.

Community members in this area moved from formal housing to an informal housing settlement with no basic infrastructure such as flushing toilets. The Committee was informed that an amount of R3 million was budgeted for the establishment of a hall in the community. The Committee was of the opinion that basic infrastructure was more of a need than that of the construction of a hall.

Of concern to the Committee was that the housing structures were made of wood and surrounded by vegetation which could place people at high risk should a fire break out.

2.1.4.1 Recommendation

The Committee RECOMMENDED that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning liaises with the municipalities in the area to investigate sustainable water sources for the harvesting of water.

2.1.4.2 Resolution

The Committee RESOLVED that it would confer with the Standing Committee on Human Settlements to consider giving attention to the living circumstances of the community and the lack of basic infrastructure.

2.1.5 Slope Stabilisation after the Knysna Fires

The Knysna fires in 2017 had a devastating effect on livelihoods and biodiversity in the area. Rehabilitation was still underway and high risk areas for potential landslides were identified as those posing a threat to safety and to downstream catchments and man-made infrastructure. These areas were prioritised because of the immediate danger of erosion and mudslides. High risk areas included, among others, Brenton-on-Sea and Brenton-on-Lake.

The Committee visited the Brenton site in Dolley Raats Street. This site was situated in an area that was not densely populated and showcased the success of restoration and stabilisation. Interventions after the fires included the installation of bio-sausages to slow water velocity which reduced sediment flow along steep slopes, the monitoring of plant regeneration for invasive alien plant regrowth and herbicide application to expected alien invasive plant areas.

Projects that involved housing on endangered slopes were not showcased and interventions in this regard were absent.

2.1.5.1 Request for information

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning provides it with a report containing the list of projects, including housing developments that were less successful in terms of restoration after the fires with specific reference to the interventions that were implemented for each project.

2.1.6 Biomass Project: Karatara

New Carbon, a company based in the Garden Route, developed innovative technological solutions for South African and global markets. The company transformed biomass from a variety of organic sources, including alien vegetation clearing into biocarbon, activated biocarbon, wood vinegar, heat energy and other market related products.

New Carbon's solutions consisted of integrating the various elements of the biomass value chain into economic, social and environmentally viable business models. Biomass sources were harvested, collected, densified and processed.

The benefits of clearing alien invasive plants was critical for water security and economic growth in the area, as well as benefiting local communities. A biomass value chain was developed through alien vegetation removal that offset clearing costs, creates new jobs and could be used to develop innovative carbon-based products using efficient technology solutions.

The complimentary feedstock sources available in the catchment and wider region included charcoal sourced from the Western Cape and other provinces that can be enhanced, wood chips and related by-products from local sawmills, garden waste from farms and households, and forestry waste from local plantations.

The Committee commended the role-players on the research and development that was undertaken. The Committee further appreciated the contribution made to in respect of the possibilities for the re-use of alien invasive plants.

However, it was unclear whether the project could be replicated and if there were any interested investors.

2.1.6.1 Request for information

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning provides it with a:

- 2.1.6.1.1 Report outlining the involvement of GreenCape in this project and also to indicate whether Wesgro was involved in offering further financial assistance; and
- 2.1.6.1.2 Response on whether the Pod system in terms of the project could be replicated and whether the concept could be sold to investors to create similar plants.

3. Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme: Wednesday 15 June 2022

The Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme encompassed the broad development agenda of the Department of Agriculture. The design and implementation are predominantly for supporting smallholder farmers in the Western Cape but does not exclude

the commercial sector. This support is to enhance land reform programmes through institutional capacity building.

The Committees visited the farms Zelpy in Waboomskraal and Herold Meander in Herald near George. The day concluded with a visit to the Outeniqua Research Farm.

3.1 Findings and observations: Zelpy Farm

This farm was situated in the Waboomskraal area, which was best suited for hops growing in South Africa due to its climate and geographical location. The main commodities on the farm were fynbos and Hops. The farmers received R7 million rand in government funding and bonded the balance to purchase the farm.

The running hops farm was purchased by the farmer in 2015. Prior to this, the farmer worked as a plant breeder for the South African Breweries.

Unfortunately, due to market factors beyond the farmer's control, the profitability of hops farming proved to be lower than was expected when the farm was originally purchased. The Department of Agriculture advised that the farmer should diversify into fynbos. Since the income from the Hops was assisting in the paying of the bond, hops continued to be the main farming enterprise in the medium term. In the long term hops growing might be replaced with protea species.

It was not clear what type of support was afforded to the farmer by the Department of Agriculture.

The Committee was informed that the neighboring farm undertook some construction work by building a road and in the process damaged a pipe that affected the water supply to the Zelpy farm which was costly to repair. The owners of the farm believed that the neighboring farm should reimburse them in this regard.

3.1.1 Request for information

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture provides it with a:

- 3.1.1.1 Report on the status of the road that was built and the shortage of water to the dam, outlining how the farmer can be assisted to get the matter resolved, avoiding formal court actions;
- 3.1.1.2 Report on farming with flowers in the Western Cape, specifically proteas, with specific reference to the state of the flower industry, its contribution to the agricultural economy in the Western Cape, lessons learnt and the challenges experienced in exporting fresh cut flowers to foreign markets;
- 3.1.1.3 Breakdown of the support provided to emerging farmers in the Western Cape, including Zelpy Farm, and the role of Casidra in this regard; and
- 3.1.1.4 List of farmers that have been enrolled and successfully completed the Emerging Farmer Programme (small scale farmers to commercial farmers).

3.2 Findings and observations: Herold Meander Farm

Herold Meander was a 100% black owned farming business, situated in Herold along the Montagu Pass Road located approximately 35km from George.

The delegation was addressed from New York by the co-owner, Mr Theo Adams, via MS Teams. The farm was purchased in 2015. The farm was not actively farmed for 8 years as the previous owners emigrated and deserted the farm, resulting in it being covered by alien vegetation. The farm formed part of the 50 Black Producers Commercialisation Programme of the Department of Agriculture and received financial support and mentorship accordingly. The farming commodities were Honeybush and Fynbos.

Challenges on the farm included housing, where the farm did not have housing for its own farm workers as the farmhouses were occupied by neighboring farm workers; inadequate living conditions; approval from the George Municipality in respect of alternative housing for ten qualifying farm occupants since 2016, the lack of a storage, packaging and processing facility for the processing of proteas and honeybush tea; the absence of Organic and Fair Trade Certification for exports; and two primary schools in Herold, one for coloured learners and one for white learners, that have not been merged by the Western Cape Education Department.

3.2.1 Request for information

3.2.1.1 The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture provides it with:

3.2.1.1.1 Information in respect of the honeybush industry with specific reference to production, pricing over the last three years, sustainability, promotion of the product and market access;

3.2.1.1.2 The legal framework for farm worker housing where farmers experience problems with people living on the farm that are not employed on the farm; and

3.2.1.1.3 A breakdown of the support that the farm has received through various sources, particularly where the Department of Agriculture was involved with providing support.

3.2.1.2 The Committee FURTHER REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture confers with the George Municipality on its decision to decline the application to build an Agri-Village and to provide the Committee with the reasons for this.

3.3 Findings and observations: Outeniqua Research Farm

The Outeniqua Research Farm served the area from the Tsitsikamma to Caledon. The farm was established for agricultural research, providing science-based solutions in response to challenges faced by farmers in the area.

Outeniqua Research Farm conducted research on dairy production and planted pasture. Part of the research portfolio on the farm included a number of plant variety trials as well as projects that were focused on the effects of pasture and alternative feed products for the cows on the farm, without compromising the quality of the milk.

The Agricultural Education and Training facility located on the farm served the entire Garden Route District. The facility liaises with the Department's Agricultural Producer Support and Development Programme in terms of which training and courses should be offered to farmers and persons interested in the agricultural sector. The Programme was assisted by visiting farms and encouraging farmers and non-farmers to enrol in courses and to utilise the training facilities offered by the farm. Service providers are appointed to train learners on specific courses such as first aid courses.

The facility has three classes that can accommodate 50 learners each. Open days are held on the farm to encourage members of the surrounding communities and school learners to visit the facility to gain a better understanding of what the agricultural sector can offer them. These consultations are free of charge for students.

The farm also hosts other departmental programmes such as the Structured Agricultural Education and Training, Veterinary Services, Sustainable Resource Management and Farmer Support that work together to support the agricultural community as a whole.

3.3.1 Request for information

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Agriculture provides it with:

- 3.3.1.1 A list of the satellite research farms in the Western Cape and the associated fields of specialisation;
- 3.3.1.2 The number of people that qualified at the training centre over the last three financial years as well as the qualifications obtained; and
- 3.3.1.3 A report on the training provided and the amount spent on training in order for the Committee to determine if the demand for training is growing or decreasing.

4. Acknowledgements

The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Mayor of the Garden Route District Municipality, The Mayor of Bitou Municipality, Ward Councillors, municipal officials, officials from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning and the Department of Agriculture for coordinating the visits and for informative engagements.