

LOCAL ACTION FOR BIODIVERSITY: WETLANDS SOUTH AFRICA

The impact of the National Wetlands Indaba on municipal planning for wetlands

How attendance at the National Wetlands Indaba has supported Overberg District Municipality with enhanced wetland management within the Western Cape

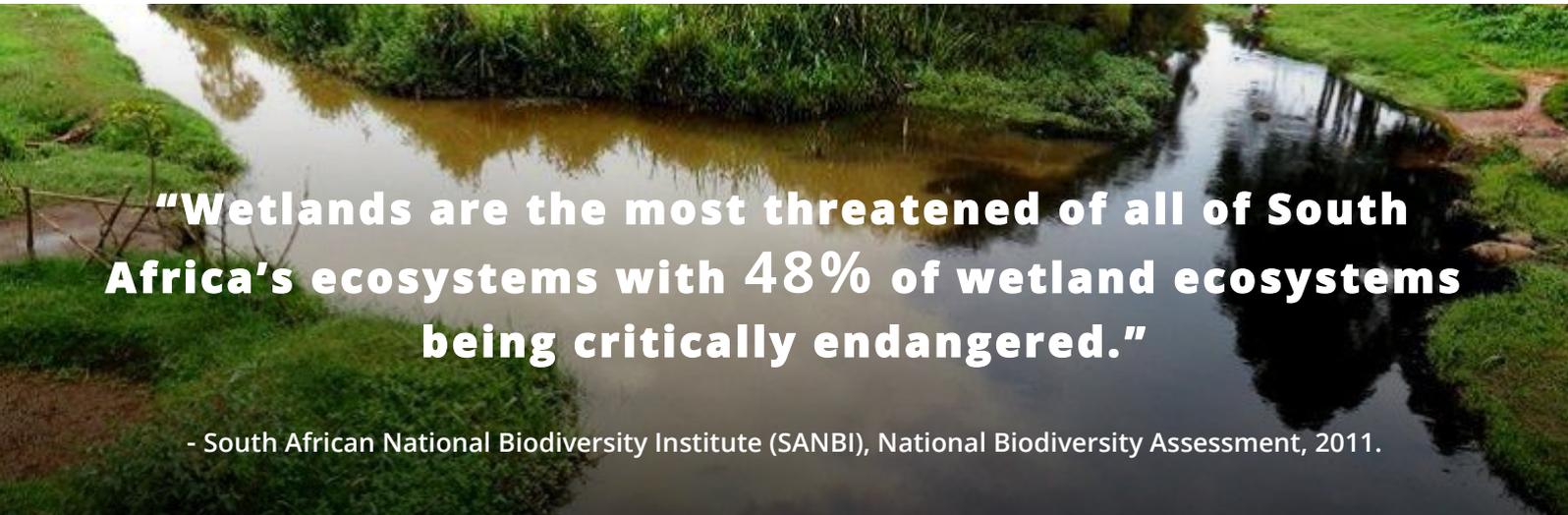
Municipalities across South Africa are often constrained in their ability to effectively manage their natural resources due to lack of capacity as well as lack of human and financial resources. As a result, natural resources such as wetlands run the risk of being mismanaged resulting in their degradation and a loss of the valuable services that they provide. The environmental management department of Overberg District Municipality (ODM) is constrained by all of the above mentioned factors. However, despite the constraints, or perhaps as a result of, ODM has been actively harnessing the network of NGOs working in environmental conservation and natural resources in the district to ensure that wetlands are managed effectively and in line with ODM's environmental mandates.

Attendance at the National Wetlands Indaba (NWI), funded by ICLEI Africa as part of the Local Biodiversity Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands South Africa) project, has supported ODM with learning best practice wetland management



methodologies, accessing a network of wetland researchers and experts to support ODM with responsible environmental management decisions as well as obtaining physical guidelines to support the municipality with enhancing their own ability to achieve their environmental mandate. ODM has

shared the lessons learnt at the NWI with the four local municipalities located within the district to ensure that these lessons are up and out-scaled across the entire region to enhance the district's capability to effectively and holistically manage and protect their wetlands.



“Wetlands are the most threatened of all of South Africa’s ecosystems with 48% of wetland ecosystems being critically endangered.”

- South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), National Biodiversity Assessment, 2011.

SETTING THE SCENE

Due to capacity constraints and limited financial resources, few local and district municipalities across South Africa have departments which are solely dedicated to environmental management. Instead environment management is usually incorporated into broader infrastructure planning departments where environmental management concerns are low on the list of priorities. Where separate environmental departments do exist in local and district municipalities, human and financial resources are usually low which constrains these departments in their environmental management capabilities.

Overberg District Municipality (ODM) is located in South Africa’s Western Cape Province. The district is home to numerous wetlands which are not only incredibly beautiful but also provide valuable ecosystem services and crucial habitat to numerous species of critically endangered flora and fauna. ODM is one of the municipalities in South Africa which is fortunate enough to have a dedicated environmental management department. However, as is the case with most municipalities across South Africa, human and financial resources are extremely limited. Despite these constraints, the ODM environmental

management department has worked hard to find innovative ways to manage and protect their natural resources, including their wetlands. By developing relationships with the networks of NGOs working in the region such as the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI), the Nuwejaars Wetland Strategic Management Area and the Overberg Renostervelt Conservation Trust (ORCT), ODM has been able guide the local NGOs’ work to ensure that each stakeholder working in the region is working towards the same goal, namely ODM’s environmental mandate *“To ensure that environmental management and the principle of sustainability enjoys high priority ...and we strive to ensure that environmental quality will be improved in terms of air, water, land and sea.”*

ODM joined the Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) in 2015 to not only learn more about wetlands and how to more deeply embed wetland planning into land-use planning, but also to benefit from the enhanced networking possibilities which offered an opportunity to learn about and bring best practice management methodologies to ODM to enhance the overall impact of their work.

THE STORY

The value of attending the annual National Wetlands Indaba

The National Wetlands Indaba (NWI) is a cross-disciplinary gathering of practitioners involved in the conservation and sustainable utilization of South Africa's wetland resources. These include scientists, decision-makers, researchers, conservationists and educators hailing from various organisations and Government departments.

As part of the LAB: Wetlands SA project, ICLEI Africa supported a minimum of one stakeholder from each of the project municipalities with attending the NWI annually for the duration of the four-year project. Each year the NWI offered numerous opportunities for the municipal members of the project to enhance their capacity for more effective management of wetlands within their own jurisdictions through the following:

- Access to lectures and presentations on topics such as the value of wetlands, new emerging best practice for planning for and with wetlands and the latest technical information, tools and guidelines available to support localised wetland management;
- An opportunity for the individual project municipal representatives to present the challenges of working with wetlands within their own jurisdictions with a wide and engaged audience and learn from wetland experts on potential methodologies to overcome these challenges;
- An opportunity for the project municipal members to meet each other and share their mutual challenges with wetland management in their respective municipalities, as well as share success stories of overcoming these challenges (i.e. an opportunity to learn from each other); and
- An opportunity to meet and bring district level challenges to the attention of representatives from the National Department of Environmental Affairs: Working for Wetlands Programme (WfW) which aims to support municipalities across South Africa with large scale infrastructure projects to rehabilitate degraded wetlands across the country.

What makes Overberg District Municipality unique?

Overberg District Municipality is located in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The municipality falls entirely within the fynbos biome in the Cape Floristic Region, a recognised global biodiversity hotspot with high levels of endemism and floral and faunal diversity. A large number of wetlands can be found throughout the municipality, including two RAMSAR sites of international importance.

Developing skills through additional targeted interventions at the NWI

In addition to the opportunities already offered by the NWI, ICLEI Africa held 'train the trainer' workshops with the project municipalities at the annual NWI's to enhance the individual project municipalities ability to effectively plan for wetlands.

During the first 'train the trainer session', through a 'learn by doing' approach, the project municipal representatives were taught effective 'interactive learning mechanisms' to create deeper understanding of the value of wetlands. The intention of providing training on these teaching methodologies was to support the project municipal representatives with tools for getting their message across more clearly when advocating for the protection and holistic management of wetlands.

During the second 'train the trainer' session, also undertaken through a 'learn by doing' approach, the project municipalities were taught how to utilise Google Earth as a tool for mapping wetlands within their jurisdictions. This was taught to the project municipal representatives to support them with commenting on land use planning applications as the law in South Africa stipulates that development cannot occur within the immediate vicinity of a wetland.

The third and final 'train the trainer' session was dedicated to providing training on the ["Wetland Management Guidelines: Building capacity and supporting effective management of wetlands within South African Municipalities"](#) (WMG) developed by ICLEI Africa. The WMG aim to support South African municipalities with best practice on how to plan for wetlands and incorporating the benefits of wetlands into urban planning whilst at the same time addressing development needs associated with rapid urbanisation.

Bringing lessons learnt back to the municipal planning level

Through the attendance at the NWI as well as attendance at the various 'train the trainer' sessions, the two municipal representatives of ODM (the entire technical team in the environmental department of ODM) enhanced their knowledge on wetlands, how they function and their value to supporting the municipality with achieving their environmental mandate; how to embed wetlands into land-use planning; learnt effective tools for communicating the

WHY WETLANDS ARE IMPORTANT TO OVERBERG

The wetlands within Overberg District Municipality are considered to be high-value 'ecological infrastructure', in that they provide vital habitat for flora and fauna, but also provide critical ecosystem services to the municipality. These include:

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- Flood attenuation
- Water filtration
- Erosion control
- Water storage
- Food provision
- Supply of raw materials
- Clean drinking water

The wetlands within the municipality also play a pivotal role in disaster risk management as well as reducing the impacts of climate change within the district.



value of wetlands; mapping wetlands using freely available GIS tools; and obtained copies of new guidelines to support wetland management within ODM going forward.

ODM now not only incorporates the learnings from the NWI into their day to day work but has also fully embedded the best practice guidelines included in the ICLEI Africa developed WMG into their land use planning decision-making.

ODM has also gone on to share this knowledge with the local NGOs working in the region through the newly revived environmental forum meetings to ensure that all local NGOs are working with the most up to date best practice methodologies for wetland management. ODM has also shared their lessons learnt from the NWI with the local municipalities within ODM (namely Theewaterskloof, Overstrand, Cape Agulhas and Swellendam Local Municipalities) thereby ensuring that wetlands within ODM are managed effectively and the benefits and services that wetlands continue to be realised throughout the district.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The LAB: Wetland SA is being implemented by the ICLEI's Cities Biodiversity Center, which is coordinated by the ICLEI Africa Secretariat

Through enhanced awareness of wetlands, and the integration of wetlands and biodiversity considerations into local government planning and decision-making, the project will build the capacity of 11 municipalities to prioritise and effectively manage wetlands and biodiversity at the local level. The project will focus on government departments and working with community stakeholders to increase awareness and community buy-in.

ABOUT ICLEI

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, we influence sustainability policy and drive local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. Our Members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systemic change for urban sustainability.

At ICLEI Africa, we serve our African members, working with cities and regions in more than 25 countries across the continent. We offer a variety of urban sustainability solutions through our dynamic and passionate team of skilled professionals.

