

Have Your Say... Changes to How Estuaries are Managed

15 July 2020



The call for better management of South Africa's estuaries has been heard. The public is invited to comment on draft amendments to the National Estuarine Management Protocol. You have until 26 July to do so.

There is no question that marine ecosystems and species are under pressure from fishing, freshwater flow reduction, coastal development, pollution and

climate change. Emerging pressures are increasing pollution concerns, desalination and ocean noise.

National Biodiversity Assessment

This was documented in the country's third [National Biodiversity Assessment](#). Published in October 2019, this scientific reflection of the state of the country's biodiversity, took five years to complete and involved nearly 480 South African scientists, many of them emerging scientists.

The study was led by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

At the October launch, the Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, Ms Barbara Creecy acknowledged the scientists' call for urgent action.

"The most concerning of the report's (five) findings relate to our freshwater ecosystems, rivers, wetlands, estuaries and freshwater fish stocks," she said.

"These are the most vulnerable of all species groups and the most threatened ecosystems in South Africa.

"The restoration and protection of these freshwater ecosystems, or what we term eco-infrastructure services, will deliver huge returns on investment with great benefit to the communities that depend on them," she said.

[Biodiversity Report. Focus On Fresh Water Ecosystems](#)

[CITES. Global Biodiversity Deliberations Start](#)

Why the fuss?

Estuaries are generally productive areas. There are some 300 along the South African coastline providing warm, shallow and calm waters. These

characteristics, together with their scenic appeal, make them focal points for development, tourism and recreation. But urban, industrial, agricultural and infrastructural development, and the manipulation of the mouths of estuaries, is threatening the natural environment.

In recent years attention has turned to amongst others:

- The Mangrove Ecosystem from Kosi Bay estuary in KwaZulu-Natal to the Tyolomnqa estuary near East London. There are eight mangrove species occurring in 31 estuaries along the east coast. The largest mangrove forests are found in the subtropical areas of iSimangaliso Wetland Park and Richards Bay estuary.
- The Orange River Mouth is the second most important estuary in South Africa in terms of conservation importance, after the Knysna Estuary. It represents one of four globally important coastal wetlands (the others being Walvis Bay lagoon, Sandwich Harbour and the Kunene River mouth).
- Durban Bay estuary is a vital resource for the citizens of Durban to access recreational, subsistence and other social benefits. Port uses and socio-economic activities in the catchments which drain into the Bay have compromised the ecosystem.
- Modifications to the Buffalo River estuary in East London has caused a loss of natural habitat, biota and basic ecosystem functions.
- The Swartkops estuary near Port Elizabeth is ranked as the 11th most important estuary in South Africa in terms of its biodiversity.
- Goukamma estuary at Knysna after an oil spill when the bulk carrier, *Kiani Satu*, which ran aground in August 2013,
- uMhlathuze estuary near Richards Bay has been altered causing a large loss of natural habitat.
- the uMfolozi, uMlalazi and the uMlathuze Sanctuary near Richards Bay where the *MV Smart* bulk carrier ran aground. About 50000 tons coal spilt into the ocean.

Read these letters from the public:

[Letter... Dead Fish Highlights River Estuary Vulnerability](#)

<https://www.cxpress.co.za/letters/distressing-lack-of-knysna-estuary-maintenance-mars-return-to-fishing-grounds/>

Standards of management

Managing estuaries is complex because they are subjected to influences from marine, riverine and terrestrial ecosystems.

The draft amendment sets the standards to ensure effective integrated management of the unique environmental, economic and social aspects of each estuary. It includes the co-operative management of these coastal zones through all spheres of government.

This includes the management of estuaries within a single municipality by that authority.

It also includes joint management of estuaries that fall within the boundaries of two municipalities or are found in cross-border provincial areas.

In each instance either a single or joint Environmental Management Plan which would have to meet certain minimum requirements would be required.

Have your say

Members of the public can submit written comments or inputs to the Minister by 26 July 2020 . Address these by hand to :

The Deputy Director-General. Attention: Mr Ruwen Pillay, Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries:Oceans and Coast. 2 East Pier Building, East Pier Road, Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Cape Town

Or email: rupillay@environment.gov.za

For access the government gazette, click on:

[National Environmental Management: Integrated Coastal Management Act, 2008 \(Act No. 24 of 2008\): Draft amendments to the National Estuarine Management Protocol \[G 43474 – GoN 705\]](#)

Comments received after the closing date may not be considered.