

## Working for Water: Securing and maintaining political support

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The Working for Water Programme has demonstrated the magnitude of resources that can be released when political support is secured. Critical success factors include:

- *clear communication with political decision makers, describing the impact of invasive alien plants*
- *placement of a driver of change within a key government department*
- *focus on delivery, particularly job creation*
- *ongoing research to build evidence for the importance of preserving natural capital*
- *a communication campaign to publicize the programme's impact and importance.*



One of the fundamental objectives of the C.A.P.E. partnership is to strengthen institutions. The establishment and maintenance of strong political support has been identified as one of the key ongoing challenges for implementing C.A.P.E.'s vision. Valuable lessons can be learned from a South African conservation programme which established strong political support, resulting in major commitment of funding and resources.

This case study examines how strategic sharing of information about the negative impact of invasive alien plants on water catchments was able to secure the support of political decision makers. Their support was translated into action through the placement of an inspirational leader within the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. Well publicized delivery in terms of job creation maintains ongoing political support.

### THE DECISION TO TARGET POLITICAL DECISION MAKERS

In 1993 a meeting of managers and conservationists at the Fynbos Forum made two resolutions which were to transform conservation in South Africa:

- The first was to approach international funders to communicate the seriousness of the threat of invasive alien plants to biodiversity in South Africa. This, arguably, was the catalyst for the development of the C.A.P.E. programme<sup>1</sup>. As the first of the country's bioregional programmes, C.A.P.E. has prompted profound changes in conservation.
- The second was to approach political decision-makers to explain the impact of invasive alien plants on water catchments. This led to the development of Working for Water.

Politicians in charge of the most relevant environmental departments were invited to a presentation on the negative impact of invasive alien plants on the supply of water from fynbos catchment areas. Those who attended were Kader Asmal, National Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, and Kobus Meiring, Provincial MEC of Environmental Affairs. The presentation not only described the devastating impact of invasive alien plants but also suggested a revolutionary way of addressing the problem, through job creation. This approach had already been piloted by the Botanical Society in a project on Table Mountain.

A week after this presentation, Dr Guy Preston was appointed to assist Minister Asmal. WWF-SA sponsored half the costs of his post. There was now someone within the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry who believed strongly in the potential of a programme to control invasive alien plants while creating jobs for the previously unemployed. He worked with Minister Asmal to initiate the Water Conservation Campaign. The objective was to improve water supplies through better catchment and water-demand management, in preference to the construction of new dams. This was a revolutionary approach for the department at the time.

### FOCUS ON DELIVERY

In 1995 the Working for Water Programme was started when R25 million was secured by Minister Asmal from the Reconstruction and Development Programme of the new democratic government. This money was spent on labour-intensive clearing of invasive alien plants throughout the country. The focus was on job creation and capacity building for the previously unemployed. There was a focus on providing jobs for women and youth. Experienced managers were seconded from a variety of implementing agencies and were inspired to work long hours by the passionately committed programme manager, Guy Preston. The resulting delivery secured further state funding.

Since then, the Working for Water concept has been extended, and several other "Working for" Programmes have been initiated: Working for Wetlands, Working on Fire and Working for Woodlands all focus on providing jobs and training for the previously unemployed. Their consistent focus on job creation and delivery, has secured them long term political support. This currently translates to combined funding of R800 million per annum.

In the 2007/8 financial year the national Working for Water budget of almost R500 million was used to create work opportunities for nearly 32 000 people, while clearing 140 796 ha and undertaking follow-up on a further 543 693 ha. In the Western Cape, the target for the programme is to clear 636 000 ha of invasive alien plants in the 10 year cycle (2000-2010) in the Berg, Breede, Fish-Tsitsikamma, Gouritz and Olifants-Doorn catchments. Conservative estimates indicate that invasive alien plants in these catchments are currently using 143 million m<sup>3</sup> of water per year, which is equivalent to 4.1% of the registered water use. If this is not cleared, the water wasted by invasive alien plants could increase to 457million m<sup>3</sup> per annum, or 13 % of the registered water use<sup>2</sup>. This would equate to half the region's domestic use, or virtually the total capacity of the large Theewaterskloof dam.

**Contact details:**

Christo Marais

Tel: 021 441 2727

Cell: 082 551 8316

Email: [chris@dwaf.gov.za](mailto:chris@dwaf.gov.za)[www.dwaf.gov.za/wfw](http://www.dwaf.gov.za/wfw)**A focus on job creation secured political support.****MAINTAINING SUPPORT THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

From the outset, a well organized publicity campaign ensured that the positive impact of the new Working for Water Programme was extensively reported in the media. Supportive politicians and donors received positive publicity. An annual report was produced which highlighted progress in terms of jobs created, training provided, and the positive impact on the environment. This material was used to secure additional support from foreign and local donors.

The publicity campaign was further supported by the development of a body of scientific literature detailing the negative impact of invasive alien plants on South Africa's water supply. This built on the existing research which had been used to motivate the programme initially. The politicians were not necessarily expected to read the scientific articles, but reference to them in letters and presentations added scientific credibility to requests for funding.

After five years of operation the Working for Water Programme convened a management conference in 2000 to promote best practice<sup>3</sup>. This was followed by a formal research symposium in 2003, the results of which were published as a special issue of *The South African Journal of Science*<sup>4</sup>. This research detailed the negative economic and ecological impacts of invasive alien plants on water supplies, biodiversity, fire intensity and flooding.

Working for Water continues to support research, and consequently a growing body of scientific literature informs the programme. There is an emphasis on research on biocontrol, as this promises the best long-term solution to the threat of many invasive alien species. C.A.P.E. has contributed by supporting research into the prioritization of invasive alien species.

**THE WAY FORWARD: PAYMENT FOR ECOSYSTEM SERVICES**

Over its 14 years of operation the Working for Water Programme has spent R4 billion in clearing nearly 2 million ha of invasive alien plants. In so doing they have created 27.5 million person days of employment. This remarkable achievement has been recognized by numerous awards.

In response to critical reviews<sup>5</sup> the programme planning was improved and there is now a strong emphasis on follow-up. Management capacity, which was a significant challenge in earlier years, has begun to stabilize. In future, secondary industries which use the cleared material productively will be promoted more intensively, particularly in accessible areas. Other future challenges will be to improve productivity and to increase the percentage of funds spent directly on wages. Although the legislative framework has improved, further work is needed to support implementation.

Water is a limiting resource for development in South Africa. Part of the long term vision of the Working for Water programme is that water users should pay for sound catchment management. This has been accepted in government policy<sup>6</sup>. Despite the huge effort made by Working for Water nationally, to date only 19% of invasions have been cleared to maintenance levels. The objective is therefore to add a levy to water tariffs to provide funding for the ongoing control of invasive alien plants.

In the course of 2009, the Treasury Department, in its forward planning, has recognized the contribution made by ecosystem services to economic development. This has resulted in mainstreaming through the inclusion of explicit support for the maintenance of ecosystem services in central government planning. The future annual budget of the Working for Water Programme is consequently likely to be over 1 billion Rand, making it the largest environmental programme in Africa, and one of the most substantial globally.

**Date:** July 2009**Key Words:**

*Working for Water, Catchment Management, Invasive Alien Plants, Job Creation, Political Support*

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<sup>1</sup> Marais C. 2008. Working for Water: *Perspectives on social upliftment through catchment management and secondary industries*. IUCN BEP C T. TMNP.

<sup>2</sup> Cullis JDS, AHM Görgens, AHM and Marais, C. 2007. A strategic study of the impact of invasive alien plants in the high rainfall catchments and riparian zones of South Africa on total surface water yield. *Water SA* Vol. 33 No. 1: 35-42.

<sup>3</sup> *Best management practices for preventing and controlling invasive alien species*. Symposium Proceedings 22-24 February 2000. Eds G Preston, G Brown and E van Wyk. 316 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Working for Water Research Contributions. *S Afr J of Science*. Vol 100. No1/2. 128pp.

<sup>5</sup> Common Ground et al 2003. *External Evaluation of the Working for Water Programme*.

<sup>6</sup> *Water Pricing Strategy*. Government Notice 29697 of 2007.