

Tackling invasive alien species: Coordination improves implementation

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C.A.P.E. has established a number of forums to support inter-institutional communication around the control of invasive alien plants and animals. Their activities are directed by a strategy and business plan and each body has an important role to play:

- ***The Task Team provides the scientific management interface, to be supported by an annual alien research seminar to facilitate communication between researchers and managers.***
- ***The two Working Groups target invasive alien plants and animals respectively, they include line managers who together prioritize species and areas for action.***
- ***The challenge for the future is to develop a mechanism with sufficient mandate to drive implementation.***

One of the primary objectives of the C.A.P.E. partnership is to strengthen institutional frameworks. C.A.P.E. has used the establishment of inter-institutional task teams as a key mechanism to promote communication and collaboration in a number of specific focus areas, including managing invasive aliens.

The Cape Floral Kingdom is the most heavily invaded region in South Africa. The rapid spread of invasive alien species is a serious threat to the survival of the area's unique biodiversity. The control of invasive alien species has therefore become a key component of the C.A.P.E. strategy. Consequently, the C.A.P.E. Invasive Alien Species Task Team was established in 2001, as part of the first phase of C.A.P.E. The objective of this task team was to bring together the diverse organizations already involved in the control of invasive alien species in order to promote collaboration and coordination.

ESTABLISHING REPRESENTATIVE STRUCTURES

During 2006, as the original task team became more active, as it was expanded to be more representative of key partner organizations. The control of invasive plants and the control of invasive animals involve different organizations, people and skills. Two separate working groups were therefore established. The objective of these working groups was to promote coordination through knowledge sharing and capacity building; research and monitoring; prevention, early detection and rapid response; and the development of supportive policies and best practice guidelines.

Control programmes for managing invasive alien plants were already well established as the Working for Water programme had generated considerable momentum. Other important role-players included the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, CapeNature and SANParks. The establishment of an invasive alien plant Working Group significantly improved communication and collaboration between key role-players.

The Working Group set up to control invasive alien animals found far less existing impetus. Before the establishment of the C.A.P.E. Invasive Alien Species Task Team there had been no comprehensive interventions or planning, and little interaction between those involved. The Invasive Animal Working Group therefore played an important role in establishing communication channels. Initially there was a strong focus on the control of invasive alien fish, as this was a project already receiving C.A.P.E. support but this has now been expanded to include other vertebrate and invertebrate species.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

In order to coordinate the activities of a large group of stakeholders it is essential to develop a common strategy. The strategy development process was therefore the primary focus of the C.A.P.E. Invasive Alien Species Task Team and its two Working Groups from 2006 to 2008. The resulting strategic goals have now been approved by all key role-players:

- Invasive alien species to be managed within appropriate policy and legislative frameworks.
- Actions of all role-players to be harmonized through strategic planning and prioritization.
- Appropriate awareness-raising, educational programmes and capacity building to be implemented.
- New IAS prevention measures to be established involving early detection and rapid response.
- Impact of existing invasive alien species to be reduced through the implementation of integrated control measures.
- Adaptive management to be informed by research, monitoring and evaluation.

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Once the strategy was completed in mid 2008, the next step was to develop a business plan. The specific actions and resources required to achieve the goals of the strategy were determined through a detailed planning process. The resulting business plan is ambitious and its implementation will require R4 billion over the next ten years.

As part of this process, priority species and areas were identified by both working groups. A particularly important meeting held during this period was an Invasive Alien Plant Planning Workshop which brought all the key organizations together. This meeting reviewed all the products available and agreed to how to improve prioritization and planning.

During this phase detailed planning and research were also undertaken in preparation for specific activities which were planned for immediate implementation:

- The animal working group supervised an Environmental Impact Assessment for the control of invasive alien fish. A number of studies were also undertaken to determine the impact of a range of other invasive alien animals.
- The plant working group commissioned contracts to refine planning and decision making tools for invasive alien plant management. Detailed plans for invasive alien plant management were also undertaken for the Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor.

DEVELOPING A STRONG RESEARCH MANAGEMENT INTERFACE

During the process of developing the strategy, the importance of creating a strong bridge between research and management had emerged. During the second phase the task team therefore focused on the provision of scientific support to ensure that management actions proposed by the working groups are at all times supported by sound scientific principles.

With this objective, the representatives on the Task Team were therefore changed, and line function managers were replaced by the heads of research within the conservation agencies and institutions such as Working for Water. These heads of research are in turn supported by research institutes such as the Centre for Invasion Biology, the Plant Protection Research Institute, Avian Demography Unit and the International Oceanography Institute. A key role of the Task Team is to address some of the key challenges relating to invasive alien species management. This will happen in conjunction with the two largest research programmes (Working for Water and the Fynbos Forum) and findings are to be integrated into planning and management processes.

In April 2009 C.A.P.E. sponsored an important Invasive Alien Species Research Seminar. This brought together researchers and decision-makers to discuss the implications of existing research for implementation. In future, an invasive alien research seminar will be held annually. This will provide a forum for researchers to share new advances relevant to implementation. Managers will also be given an opportunity to identify key research questions which would support their management decisions. The overall objective will be to promote the establishment of sound best practice guidelines and to ensure sustainable invasive alien species management.

There is a need to maintain coordination between the scientific task team and the working groups. This requires ongoing intervention, support and coordination.

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Invasive Alien Plants, Invasive Alien Animals, Invasive Alien Species, Task Team, Working Group, Strategy Development

Signatory Partners include:

Bird Life South Africa, Botanical Society of South Africa, CapeNature, City of Cape Town, Conservation International, Department of Agriculture, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Development Bank of South Africa, Eastern Cape Dept of Agriculture and Land Affairs, Eastern Cape Dept of Economic Development and Environment Affairs, Eastern Cape Parks, Fauna & Flora International, Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, Open Africa, South African National Biodiversity Institute, South African National Parks, Table Mountain Fund, United Nations Development Programme, Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa, Wilderness Foundation, WWF - SA

SECURING COMMITMENT FOR IMPLEMENTATION

If the potential of the strategy is to be realized, implementation needs to be promoted through the substantive commitment of individual organizations. The current representatives on the Task Team and Working Groups are generally not mandated to commit their organizations' resources. The institutionalization of the agreed strategy therefore needs to be achieved through another mechanism. It envisaged that a high level steering committee be established to secure institutional commitment and accountability.