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Another climate change-related risk is the risk of increased wildfires as the climate becomes hotter and drier in some areas. In 2008 areas managed by local councils were being described as “irresponsible, because we’re going to have to deny cover on that.”

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What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is the full variety of life on Earth – from the tiniest plant to the largest animal. Its complexity is measured in terms of variations in: the number of different species, the genetic wealth within each species and the interrelationships between species in ecosystems.

South Africa is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world: with a land area of 1.2 million km² - representing just 1.24% of the earth’s surface - South Africa contains almost 1% of the world’s species. With over 6% of the world’s mammal and reptile species, it is one of the most biodiverse regions in the world. Biodiversity is the full variety of life on Earth, including the genetic wealth within each species and the interrelationships between species in ecosystems.

What evidence is there of rising sea levels?

Scientists record the the intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change show a global average surface temperature increase over the 20th century of about 0.6°C. The ten hottest years on record from 1880 have all been since 1990 (State of the World, 2006). Temperature records from the Sandveld of the Western Cape show a rise in temperatures of about 1°C since the 1950s. Scientists predict that the temperature of the oceans will increase by about 2°C by the year 2100. Sea levels have risen by about 1.5 m since the 1900s. An increase in temperature leads to the melting of ice sheets and glaciers.

How do greenhouse gases affect climate?

Greenhouse gases are like panes of glass in a greenhouse, allowing short wave energy to pass through them and radiating long wave heat radiation back into the atmosphere. Trapping additional heat energy changes the climate by increasing temperatures and changing rainfall patterns, relative humidity and wind speed.

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What are the predictions for the future?

Under the ‘business as usual’ scenario, global temperatures are predicted to increase by 4-6°C by 2090, unless we act to stop climate change. Mitigation measures are interventions to reduce the sources of or enhance sinks for greenhouse gases. Mitigation measures are interventions to reduce the sources of or enhance sinks for greenhouse gases.

What are some Frequently Asked Questions about climate change and how it may affect us in South Africa?

Adapting to increased risk of floods and drought

Changes in rainfall intensity and variability due to climate change are expected to increase both flooding and drought in many areas. The Okavango and Okavango Delta are a number of large flood events in the past few years, some because inappropriate development of rural areas and holiday homes in the low-lying coastal areas were allowed by municipalities. In other cases of flooding, informal settlements were inappropriately located in floodplains because residents had no other options.

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