

What drives environmental change in Mpumalanga?



Environmental change is often caused by human activities and behaviour. These are the driving forces of environmental change. Driving forces can be international or local, and often relate to our economy, society, and political system.

International driving forces that can affect Mpumalanga include trade and global markets, the political climate in neighbouring countries and abroad, agreements between different countries and international standards of practice.

Local driving forces are those that originate from within South Africa, and are related to economic, social and political issues. These local driving forces can be national, provincial or local in nature. Even a single individual can be a powerful driving force behind environmental change.

The main economic sectors in Mpumalanga will form the local economic driving forces in the province. The main sectors include manufacturing, mining, electricity generation, agriculture, forestry and tourism. The mining, manufacturing, agriculture, forestry and electricity generation sectors will have a directly visible impact on their immediate surroundings, whereas the tourism sector may show more subtle impacts in the immediate vicinity, with impacts also being experienced further afield in different resources. The tourism sector is currently experiencing a growth phase, however increased growth and activity in the other sectors may eventually lead to a decline in tourism because of the visual and other impacts associated with these activities. It is therefore important that economic growth in Mpumalanga takes place in a planned and controlled manner.

Social driving forces in Mpumalanga include land reform, population growth, population structure, population mobility and distribution. In Mpumalanga 558 land claims have been settled, involving almost 5000 households and 25000 beneficiaries (as at 30 September 2002). Currently the population of Mpumalanga is mostly non-urban, with the largest sector of the population being African. Almost 40% of the African population is below the age of 15 years, while only 3% of the population is older than 65 years. These population dynamics on their own will contribute to specific environmental impacts.

Political driving forces include specific institutional arrangements within the province, as well as any policy or legislation governing Mpumalanga. Both national and provincial policy and legislation as well as local by-laws will become driving forces behind environmental change in Mpumalanga. In addition, policy and legislation can become a response to environmental change.