Mr G R Morgan (DA) to ask the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs:

(1) (a) What are her department’s responsibilities towards the management of Ramsar sites and (b) how does it coordinate its efforts with other relevant management authorities;

(2) what is the significance of each of the Ramsar sites;

(3) (a) why were the (i) Blesbokspruit and (ii) Orange River Mouth placed in the Montreux Record and (b) what efforts are being made to return them to full Ramsar status;

(4) whether any other Ramsar sites are under threat of being placed in the Montreux Record; if not, how was this conclusion reached; if so, what are the relevant details;

(5) whether attempts are being made to get new sites onto the Ramsar list; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?
114. THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ANSWERS:

(1) (a) The Department of Environmental Affairs is the Administrative Authority of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in South Africa, which involves promotion of conservation and wise use of wetlands.

(b) The efforts are coordinated through various fora and committees, and the monitoring of management plans, submitted by management authorities reporting on Ramsar sites.

(2) There are currently nineteen Ramsar sites in South Africa and such are:

- Barberspan (North West Province)
- De Hoop Vlei (Western Cape)
- Blesbokspruit (Gauteng)
- De Mond (Western Cape)
- St Lucia System (Kwa Zulu Natal (KZN))
- Turtle Beaches/Coral Reefs of Tongaland (KZN)
- Langebaan (Western Cape)
- Kosi Bay (KZN)
- Lake Sibaya (KZN)
- Orange River Mouth (Northern Cape)
- Verlorenvlei (Western Cape)
- Wilderness Lakes (Western Cape)
- uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (KZN)
- Ndumo Game Reserve (KZN)
- Seekoeivlei Nature Reserve (Free State)
- Nylsvlei Nature Reserve (Limpopo)
- Verloren Valei Nature Reserve (Mpumalanga)
- Makuleke Wetlands (Limpopo)
- Prince Edward Islands (Antarctica)

These sites are part of the international list of Ramsar sites that are designated as flagships for demonstrating conservation, good management practices and wise use of wetlands in their respective countries, as informed by the Convention. Notwithstanding the dynamics in each of the
sites, their qualification for being designated as Ramsar sites demonstrate their significant value in terms of conservation.

(3) (a)(i) Blesbokspruit was placed on the Montreux Record in response to contamination by large quantities of polluted water discharged from adjacent mines.

(ii) Orange River Mouth was placed in the Montreux Record following the collapse of the salt marsh component of the estuary, and the alteration of the flow of the Orange River.

(b)(i) For Blesbokspruit, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Environment, Gauteng Provincial Government, which is the responsible management authority for the site, assigned a project manager for Blesbokspruit, in particular to plan and monitor the site with the aim to restore and enhance the ecological characteristics for which Blesbokspruit was included in the List. The system seems to be stabilizing as a result of monitoring of water quality and other related conservation interventions, however it may still take a while for this site to be removed from the Montreux Record due to the consequential impact from mining activities.

(b)(ii) For Orange River Mouth, the Orange River Mouth Management Committee has been established to: (a) facilitate the process of rehabilitating the site by Working for Wetlands (b) initiate the declaration of the site as a protected area in terms of the Protected Areas Act, and (c) establish a management structure for the protected area.

(4) No other Ramsar sites at the moment seem to be under threat to be placed on the Montreux Record.

All the remaining sites seem to be meeting the criteria that led to their listing as informed by management plans, and reports of the protected areas' management authorities, as well as updates of Ramsar Information Sheets provided by these management authorities.

(5) The Ntsikeni Vlei Nature Reserve in KwaZulu Natal is in the process to be listed onto the Ramsar list. The consultation process for the proposal with the relevant Departments to avoid future conflict of interest in the same area has been finalised, whereafter the proposal will be published for comment and approved by the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs before submitting it to the Ramsar Secretariat for inclusion in the Ramsar list.