



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ref:02/1/5/2

MINISTER

QUESTION NO. 184 FOR ORAL REPLY: NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

A draft reply to Mr O S Terblanche (Western Cape: DA) to the above-mentioned question is enclosed for your consideration.

**MS NOSIPHO NGCABA
DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

DATE:

DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED

**MRS B E E MOLEWA, MP
MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

DATE:

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

(For oral reply)

QUESTION NO. 184 {CO447E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 27 of 2016

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 18 October 2016

Mr O S Terblanche (Western Cape: DA) to ask the Minister of Environmental Affairs:

(a) Why has her Department allowed the alien vegetation, Black Wattle, to grow in South Africa and (b) what action is her Department taking to bring its growth under control in the future?

184. THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPLIES:

a) Black Wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*) is indigenous to Australia, and was imported to South Africa in 1864 for shade, wind breaks on the plantations, tanning and firewood purposes. It has been widely planted in South Africa, and now forms the basis of a small but significant industry.

The species is highly invasive and has spread over an area of almost 2.5 million ha in South Africa, where it has significant negative impacts on water resources, biodiversity, erosion, grazing, wild fires and the stability and integrity of riparian ecosystems.

b) Invasive species are controlled by the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) (Act No. 10 of 2004) – Alien and Invasive Species (AIS) Regulations, which were gazetted on 01 August 2014 and became a law on 01 October 2014. The AIS Regulations lists four different categories of invasive species that must be managed, controlled or eradicated from areas where they may cause harm to the environment. Black Wattle is a Category 2 species. Land-users may apply for a Permit to have Black Wattle on their land. It is exempted for an existing plantation, meaning that a plantation which existed when the Regulations came into effect, is exempted from requiring a Permit for any restricted activity in terms of the Act, if such plantation is authorised in terms of section 22(1)(a) or (b) of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998).

The Department therefore does not allow Black Wattle to be planted illegally in South Africa, or to spread out of control. The invasion of the plant is the responsibility of the land-users.

The Department, through the Working for Water Programme, has been working on managing invasive alien plants for the last 21 years. The primary focus has been on invasive trees that negatively impact upon water resources. Due to the extent of the national invasive alien plant problem, and the limited resources and capacity, only certain catchments have been worked on. In 2008, a national prioritisation strategy was developed to prioritise quaternary catchments in the country to guide the investment of resources in managing invasive alien plants. Within these prioritised areas, alien clearing projects (using mechanical and chemical control) have been operational, and one of the primary species that has been focused on is Black Wattle. The extent of the invasion of Black Wattle is way beyond mechanical and chemical control only, and the real long-term solution is biological control of the species.

The Department has an ongoing investment in biological control of invasive alien plants. One of the priority investment projects is the work being done by the ARC-PPRI on Black Wattle funded by the Department. The biological control project on Black Wattle focuses on using seed-feeding agents that do not affect the standing trees. The seed-bank can then be decreased, reducing the potential invasion without affecting the legally permitted stands of Black Wattle. The Department has been investing in such biological control since 2001, with the first releases of seed feeding agents in 2003. There are two further agents under investigation, and the Department has committed to work on testing these agents for the next three years.

The departmental action against invading Black Wattle is primarily to enforce the legislation, and secondly to help land-users to manage the populations in priority quaternary catchments using mechanical and chemical control. The ongoing research on biological control agents and the evaluation of their effectiveness is a priority to the Department. The larger invasions in lower priority areas are reduced with biological control, giving the land-users improved chances of success in managing the species on their land. There is significant potential to use Black Wattle for value-added industries – the use of the solid wood or chipped wood for building materials, rustic furniture, biofuels and biomass for energy foci. Black Wattle is also a valuable source of biomass for rural communities, for firewood, building materials, fencing poles and the like. The need is to demarcate the woodlots where they can grow, and to contain them outside of these areas, given the very negative impacts on the productive use of land (especially in terms of grazing and water security, as well as fire risks and erosion) outside of such areas.

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