



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ref: 02/1/5/2

MINISTER

QUESTION NO. 2314 FOR WRITTEN REPLY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

A draft reply to Mrs J F Terblanche (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 WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

DATE:

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 2314

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 26 NW2690E

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 26 August 2011

Mrs J F Terblanche (DA) to ask the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs:

- (1) What is the (a) total expenditure, (b) expenditure on fence maintenance and (c) expenditure on other infrastructure for the Highveld National Park in the (i) 2006-07, (ii) 2007-08, (iii) 2008-09, (iv) 2009-10 and (v) 2010-11 financial years;
- (2) whether any systems are in place to resolve the problems of the (a) presence of increasing numbers of farmers and livestock and (b) poaching of game in the Highveld National Park; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (3) whether an environmental impact assessment was conducted to determine the impact that the new Eskom infrastructure might have on the Highveld National Park; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details with regard to the (a) findings of the assessment and (b) recommendations made to minimise the impact on the environment;
- (4) what was the total game population for the Highveld National Park for the (a) 2006-07, (b) 2007-08, (c) 2008-09, (d) 2009-10 and (e) 2010-11 financial years?

Mrs J F Terblanche (DA)

SECRETARY TO PARLIAMENT

HANSARD

PAPERS OFFICE

PRESS

2314. THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ANSWERS:

BACKGROUND OF PROPOSED HIGHVELD NATIONAL PARK (HNP)

The proposal for the development of the HNP dates back from as early as 1984, when the Department of Agriculture decided to inspect the campsites of the townlands of the surrounding area of Potchefstroom with the aim to rent it. During this stage it became clear that the value of the HNP grassland was by far higher than the mere agricultural value and the thought of establishing the park was brought into perspective.

The development of the HNP was approved by the National Parks Board (now known as SANParks) in 1992. However, due to pending land claim issues from the Barolong community, the process of the development of the HNP was put on hold, but it was revived again during 1996 and eventually led to the launching of the HNP in February 1997. The park manager was appointed in 1996 and the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism formally approved the project for the development of the HNP in August 1997.

Due to the Barolong's determination of pursuing their land claims at all cost in 1997 and 1998, the SANDF withdrew from the project on 19 June 1998. A written promise was made to the City Council that, if the current problems are resolved, SANParks could again consider the opinion in future.

BIODIVERSITY INVESTIGATION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARK

The natural resources of the HNP are essentially characterized by two important elements, namely the landscape with its associated underlying soils and geology and the biotic communities which exist within this environment. Both of these aspects have been impacted to some degree in the past and the vegetation has been subjected to long and heavy utilization, probably from overgrazing. It was observed that the main causes of degradation contributing towards severe soil erosion in the area proposed for the HNP are overgrazing, trampling by livestock and fire. Livestock grazing was observed to have an extensive impact on the vegetation and freshly burnt grasslands were found to be very attractive to livestock thus resulting in concentrated grazing pressure. This resulted in severe soil loss in some areas as well as to a change in species composition and vegetation structure. The *Acacia*

Woodland communities form an important part of the vegetation in the HNP, and these communities are adversely affected by unsustainable wood collection.

The study concluded in 2003 on potential areas for a Grassland National Park has indicated that this is not the best area for a Grassland National Park, but is one possibility among others. In 2007 the fence surrounding the park was constructed, and the main entrance gate to the park was completed. However, problems such as settling of people within the area, fence cutting, harvesting of trees for firewood, and uncontrolled fire and livestock grazing were still evident in the park.

CONCLUSION

The NHP was threatened by increasing urbanization and unsustainable use of natural resources. The natural resources of the HNP have been adversely affected to some degree in the past and the vegetation has been subjected to frequent fires, severe soil erosion and overgrazing by livestock. These problems were not only confined to those that are measured scientifically, but also included a multitude of social ones as the park exist in a social as well as an ecological matrix. Given the size of the park and the above mentioned ecological problems associated with the park, it was recommended that this area be developed as a provincial reserve as it does not fulfil all the values constituting a national park.

FEEDBACK TO PROVINCE

On 10 September 2009, the then Minister of Water and Environmental affairs send a communication to the MEC of North West to indicate that the area does not qualify to be a national park and it should be declared and managed as a provincial nature reserve.

The Highveld Nature Reserve is a provincial nature reserve which should be managed by the North West province. Any enquiries regarding the establishment and management of the nature reserve should therefore be directed to the North West Province.

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