

SA signs regional, intercontinental conservation agreements impacting planning, policymaking

Two conservation-related agreements were signed earlier this month to support regional and intercontinental cooperation in the field of biodiversity.



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The first agreement is for a five-year project that aims to develop and enhance national spatial biodiversity assessments, planning and prioritisation (SBAPP) processes and products across four Southern African countries (South Africa, Namibia, Mozambique and Malawi).

“It is difficult to preserve something that you don’t know enough about. Through mapping and prioritising, public and private sector conservation efforts can be optimised. The South African National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi) has some important tools that enable decision makers to take the necessary measures to mitigate the impact of development. This is world-class and enables them to make informed decisions at municipal, provincial and national levels. This project will allow all four countries to take this vital work forward,” said Ghislain Rieb, head of the infrastructure and environmental team at Agence Française de Développement (AFD).

Sanbi, a pioneer in SBAPP in the region, is the lead implementing agency of the project. AFD and Fonds Français pour l’Environnement Mondial (FFEM) will collectively inject €4m in funding into the project.

Peer-to-peer exchanges

The second agreement is a four-party partnership agreement for the implementation of peer-to-peer exchanges between South Africa and France. Sanbi and South African National Parks (SanParks) both share aspects of the mandate of the Office Français de la Biodiversité (OFB).

OFB and Sanbi, for example, have similar mandates that include reporting on the conservation status of biodiversity and making biodiversity information available to regulators, policymakers and managers. SanParks and the OFB, on the other hand, share a mandate of undertaking and supporting protected natural area management.

“Endowed with a wide range of duties at national level, OFB will develop its international cooperation throughout the project by exploring and sharing technical solutions on structuring knowledge and expertise, mobilisation of civil society and management of marine protected areas,” said Cyrille Barnerias, European and international relations director at OFB.

The exchanges between Sanbi and OFB will focus on the SBAPP processes, the concrete experience and tools developed in South Africa and France and how they can enrich each other. They will also link in relevant experts from Namibia, Mozambique and Malawi ensuring many clear avenues for collaboration and skills and experience sharing across all five countries.



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Focus on marine protected areas

Dr Luthando Dziba, managing executive: conservation services division at SanParks, said: “The biodiversity and ecological integrity of many marine ecosystems are threatened. The potential benefits for humans from our oceans are consequently also at risk. Therefore, some marine habitats, species and ecosystem functions are protected from human pressures in marine protected areas. Exchanges between SanParks and OFB will focus on marine protected areas (MPAs), a recently expanded conservation commitment for SanParks which also requires building up of resources. It will focus on development of management plans, socio-ecological baseline assessments, MPA effectiveness assessments and the role of governance in the marine space.”

Drawing on its experience creating the Arcachon Basin Marine Nature Park management plan, OFB will support SanParks in developing management plans for its three new MPAs - Addo Elephant (Eastern Cape), Robben Island (Western Cape), and Namaqua (Northern Cape). Capacity development will also include support of additional science capacity in SanParks.

This will play an important role in policymaking as South African authorities work towards developing the blue economy at a time when economic recovery and job creation are priorities.



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Facilitate learning in ocean conservation

“This project will greatly strengthen SanParks’ capacity to manage MPAs in South Africa. We are excited to partner with OFB and are confident that our collaboration and knowledge-sharing will facilitate learning in a critical conservation arena, namely our oceans, while solidifying our country’s standing in the global conservation field,” said Dr Dziba.

“This agreement will help protect a resource that is strategic for the country when it comes to everything from the management of sea and coastal fisheries to the development of tourism. It is also an important opportunity to highlight the steps that South Africa has taken since 2019 by developing a network of MPAs. Management plans for MPAs will convert policy into action and involve all stakeholders,” Rieb concluded.

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