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PROCEEDINGS OF MINI-PLENARY SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Members of the mini-plenary session met at Committee Room M46 at 16:45.

House Chairperson Mr C T Frolick took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayer or meditation.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): ... [Inaudible.] ... to the victims of floods in the recent past in the country, as well as the murder of some of the tourists in our game parks - Kruger National Park and so forth. May we keep them in mind as we observe this moment of silence. Please be seated.

APPROPRIATION BILL

Debate on Vote No 32 - Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

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The MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Hon Chairperson, hon Deputy Ministers Swarts and Singh, hon chairperson of the portfolio committee, Ms Gantsho, members of the portfolio committee, Members of Parliament, chairpersons of board and members and CEOs of our entities; director-general, Ms Nomfundo Tshabalala, fellow South Africans, good afternoon. I want to just add on to what the Chairperson said. Our hearts and our minds are with the families of the two people that were murdered in the Kruger National Park, Mr Ernst and Mrs Dina Marais.

Colleagues, it's an honour for me to table the 2026-27 Budget Vote for the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to both Deputy Minister Bernice Swarts and Narend Singh for their support and collaboration. I also want to thank director-general, DG, and deputy director-general, DDGs, and entity leaders, as well as the whole Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment family.

While our mandate is to protect the environment for future generations, we must also use our natural resources to drive economic growth and create jobs. We cannot be seen only as a

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regulator while South Africans face serious socioeconomic challenges. We must be recognised as a key sector in unlocking growth and opportunity in line with our national priorities. This budget of R9,127 billion is tabled in that spirit.

Hon members, with a budget allocation that presents only 0,38% of the national appropriation, we are not delusional about our fiscal constraints. However, we remain undeterred as we work towards our strategic goal of ensuring fiscal accountability and stability. Every rand in this budget has been allocated to protect ecosystems, strengthen climate adaptation, improve environmental regulation and support inclusive economic growth and job creation.

Over the medium term, R12,9 billion will go directly to goods and services, including the Expanded Public Works Programme implementation of the Forestry Master Plan, implementation of the Climate Change Act and rollout of the Waste Management Strategy. Job creation remains a key priority in the department's R960 million budget allocation towards the Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, in the 2026-27 financial year that aims to create more than 71 000 work opportunities and 45 000 full-time equivalent jobs.

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These opportunities provide meaningful work that helps people support their families and their communities. We will continue to request more support from National Treasury. That will enable us to deliver on these programmes and possibly create even more jobs, which to us are not just only targets.

One of our realities are that we are contending with climate change in real time through frequent droughts, floods and heatwaves. We saw that this year again. The January floods that affected our entities, the SA National Biodiversity Institute, SANBI, SA National Parks, SANParks, and the Kruger National Park, highlighted the urgent need for better preparedness. In fact, SANParks was forced to reprioritise R51 million from their surplus funds that were earmarked for important digital upgrades toward immediate infrastructure rehabilitation. My department has also reprioritised money for that.

The implementation of the Climate Change Act is the tool that will help us to create a national framework for responding to climate change, supporting a just transition to a low-carbon economy and improving resilience. However, I wish to stress that climate action requires adequate, accessible financing.

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This is a message that I am continually sharing with our development economy counterparts on international platforms. We cannot do this alone and we will need the assistance of richer countries.

In this budget, we have allocated R53,5 million towards air quality. We also continue to actively address air quality challenges, which is evident in the imminent countrywide deployment of over 300 low-cost air quality monitors to enhance national air quality management. Pollution prevention also remains a top priority.

The draft National Waste Management Strategy of 2026 promotes partnerships, promotes accountability and collaboration to improve waste management and reduce pollution. Once finalised, this strategy will be published for implementation this year. All climate action must not only be co-ordinated, but it must be science-based. This is why the Oceans and Coasts Programme remains important. For example, last year we published the 2024-25 Annual Science report on South Africa's Marine Ecosystems to support climate adaptation planning. Building on this, we will continue our work at our remote research stations in Antarctica, Gough Island and the Prince Edward

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Islands, positioning South Africa at the forefront of marine science and future economy opportunities.

Vital to many coastal communities is our Fisheries Management Programme with an allocation of R514 million for this financial year. We also remain committed to science-based decision-making and support for the fishing sector, and that is why the appeals that were launched by the small-scale fishing sector was adjudicated by me in a very quick time, and I ruled in favour of them. The department will remain committed to science-based decision-making, and we will remain committed to supporting our small-scale fishing sector.

In line with this, the department has committed R130 million for conducting pelagic and demersal surveys in 2026, which will also operationalise 12 proclaimed fishing harbours, strengthen enforcement within the Exclusive Economic Zone and improve support for small-scale fishing co-operatives and communities.

We also look forward to publishing the 2026 Aquaculture Sector Performance report to assess the growth and challenges of the industry. To support this work, the Marine Living Resources

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Fund is reviewing its revenue framework and fee structure to address financial pressures and to improve service delivery, while continuing using science-based management to protect marine resources from the impacts of climate change.

South Africa recently celebrated the International Day of Biological Diversity, showcasing our biodiversity and our global leadership in that regard. With our biodiversity and conservation programme accounting for R261 million of our budget, we will remain leaders in that field. We will also continue strengthening compliance and enforcement.

The National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking remains a key tool, supported by stronger investigations, intelligence sharing and targeted enforcement operations. We will also intensify efforts in priority areas, including strengthening operations in the Kruger National Park and co-operate with regional partners such as Mozambique to address cross-border environmental crime, which we have experienced this week again on people. The department is also reviewing the Environmental Impact Assessment System to improve its effectiveness and better measure its contribution to sustainable development.

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I have also challenged my department to modernise service delivery. We already see the benefits of this through the e-fishing system and the National Screening Tool, and we aim to use these lessons to expand similar digital services across other areas. Through transfers and subsidies amounting to R7,6 billion over a three-year period, we remain committed to supporting all our public entities to ensure long-term sustainability and efficiency.

We are also celebrating something this week, although under very difficult circumstances with the death of two people in the Kruger National Park. On Sunday, the Kruger National Park is having its centenary celebrations. A hundred years of conservation and science-based research. I want to congratulate SANParks and Kruger National Park. You are truly a beacon for all of us.

In conclusion, sustainable resource management is not a barrier to growth. It is an enabler of growth. Our national assets must therefore benefit all South Africans. And while we are mindful of our challenges, we remain undeterred with this. Me and my Department, both my Deputy Ministers, the DG and everybody there at the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and

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the Environment, commit ourselves towards these goals. I thank you.

Ms N GANTSHO: Hon Chair, greetings to the hon Minister, Deputy Ministers, hon members and our guests. Today I present the Portfolio Committee report on the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Strategic Plan, Annual Performance Plan, APP, and Budget Vote 32. At its core, this report evaluates whether the department and its entities are positioned to protect our environment, conserve natural resources and deliver measurable public value under difficult fiscal conditions. The report is tabled at a time of increasingly severe floods, droughts, heat waves and storms that are costing lives, livelihoods and infrastructure.

Schools, clinics, housing, water and road infrastructure are being destroyed at a pace and scale that exceeds our ability to restore them. These climate disasters are undermining constitutional rights to freedom of movement, education, healthcare, water and food. Climate disaster preparedness, recovery and resilience cannot be addressed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment alone. They require co-ordinated government-wide response that strengthens alignment

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and accelerates actions across national, provincial and local governments. This co-ordination will be instrumental in protecting the most vulnerable citizens across our communities, including those living in low-income and informal settlements, women and female-headed households, the elderly, children, persons with disabilities and animals.

Currently, our municipalities remain reactive despite the availability of expert climate data from institutions like SA Weather Services, SAWS, and SA National Biodiversity Institute, SANBI. This disconnect requires urgent rectification. Section 24 of our Constitution mandates that the department protect and conserve natural resources, promote a healthy environment while supporting equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations. The mandate remains broad, evolving and significant, but the R9,13 billion budget for 2026-27, is insufficient.

The reduction of the departmental budget threatens high-impact environmental programmes and the development of small-scale fishers and foresters, the circular economy, the planting of trees, law enforcement and biodiversity conservation and sustainable use, combating climate change, improving air

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quality, small, medium and micro enterprises, SMMEs, development and the transformation of the economic sector under the purview of the department. Despite the financial constraints, the department has identified seven ambitious priorities, including science-based decision-making, climate change mitigation and adaptation, transforming iconic natural spaces and inclusive wildlife economy, coast for people and nature, accelerated regulation and fiscal accountability.

These priorities reflect a strong policy logic and show a sensible attempt to balance environmental stewardship with economic growth, job creation, and institutional reform. However, we remain concerned about systemic pressures such as biodiversity loss, pollution, and inadequate support for black entrants to the forestry, biodiversity, and fisheries sectors. Collaboration is essential to tackling these challenges. By strengthening alliances with international bodies, local communities, and the private sector, we can leverage collective expertise and drive innovation. We commend our entities' efforts to implement commercialisation strategies, which help reduce their reliance on the national fiscals.

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In conclusion, despite the budget cuts, we believe that the R9,13 billion allocation still holds significant potential to safeguard our environment and build climate resilience. Given the environmental and climate changes we face, we firmly support this budget, and we urge that the House support it. Thank you.

IsiZulu:

Mnu S W MKHIZE: Sihlalo ohloniphekile, ngibingelele uNgqongqoshe, nani boSekela Ngqongqoshe, namalungu eNdlu ephakamileyo yezwe lakithi laseNingizimu Afrika.

English:

Today, the uMkhonto weSizwe Party rises to firmly oppose Budget Vote No 32. We do so because the budget reflects a department that speaks the language of transformation, climate resilience, and biodiversity protection, yet continues to fail the poor rural communities, unemployed youth, small-scale fishers, and ordinary South Africans who are meant to benefit from our environmental resources. This department tells us about inclusive growth, cost for people and nature, and transforming iconic natural spaces, yet the reality on the

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ground is different. Communities surrounding protected areas remain poor.

Small-scale fishers continue to suffer; infrastructure is collapsing; environmental programmes are shrinking and jobs creation targets are being reduced. This happens while communities struggle and administration budgets continue to grow. The committee report itself confirms that the department's overall budget has declined in real terms by 3,5%. Environmental programmes, which are critical for Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, jobs and poverty elevation, has been reduced by over R122 million, nominally this year, and by 8,1% in real terms.

Forestry management has also declined sharply, and fisheries management has suffered another reduction. You would swear that the department is trying to shrink itself into greatness. How can an honest government claim to prioritise job creation while cutting programmes that directly employ poor people in rural communities? The reality is that this government speaks from both sides of its mouth.

IsiZulu:

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Bayishaya phambili, bayishaya emuva.

English:

The department claims alignment with the Medium-Terms Development Plan, MTDP, the priorities of the Seventh Administration, but alignment on paper means nothing if communities do not experience change in reality.

IsiZulu:

Ngathiu Hulumeni woBumbano lweSizwe awazi nqindi nasibhakela nje.

English:

The portfolio committee itself observes that some department targets were replaced with less ambitious ones. This is because of officials and Minister who want to be on autocruise at the expense of our people. That is deeply concerning. Instead of strengthening accountability during a time of environmental crisis, this department is lowering the bar. The MK Party rejects this culture of managing decline.

IsiZulu:

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Ake sithi nje, jeqe, sithi ukubuka laphaya izinhloka eziholwa
ilo mnyango, phecelezi ...

English:

... the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
entities. On SANParks, we note with concern that the entity is
becoming increasingly dependent on tourism revenue for
survival. The research briefing explicitly warns the SANParks
shift towards self-financing exposes it to economic and
tourism fluctuations. At this time, infrastructure backlogs
remain unresolved. Anti-poaching pressures continue, and grant
funding has declined sharply, including a shocking 61%
increase in the Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, grants.
This means fewer jobs, weaker conservation capacity, and
increased pressure on local tourism affordability. Rural South
Africans are being priced out of their own natural heritage,
while international tourists carry the system financially.
That is not transformation.

IsiZulu:

Nakamhlolo, akusoze. Le, esimangaliso.

English:

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The budget reveals another contradiction. Biodiversity conservation receives massive increase while tourism and socioeconomic development programs are cut. Tourist and business development declines by almost 32%, while socioeconomic development also declined. This raises serious concerns about community beneficiation. How do you speak of inclusive conservation while reducing programmes and the local economic participation? Conservation without community will never succeed at sustainability.

IsiZulu:

Sihlalo, laphayana kwa-SA National Biodiversity Institute, Sanbi, ...

English:

... presents another worrying trend, Programme 3, Biodiversity Science and Policy Advice, declining drastically by nearly 68%. Yet government constantly speaks about science-based decisions making. How can you use science guide policy, when scientific capacity itself is being defunded? This contradiction exposes a department driven more by public relations slogans than practical implementations. On the SA Forestry Company Limited, SAFCOL, the situation is equally

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alarming. The entity budget declines by more than 32% overall with Komati Land Forest suffering major reduction.

The report warns that this threatening production, capacity revenue, generation, and long-term sustainability. The forest sector should be driving industrialisation, timber processing, rural development, and employment. Instead, SAFCOL is entering a phase of financial contraction and uncertainty. South Africa is facing worsening climate disasters. Floods in Limpopo and Mpumalanga have already caused that and destroyed infrastructure. Cape Town has recently also experienced severe weather condition with devastating impact. Yet many municipalities remain unprepared, under-capacitated, and poorly co-ordinated.

Despite this reality, communities still experience sewage flowing into rivers and illegal dumping. The MK Party believes that environmental justice cannot exist without economic justice. Our people cannot eat policy frameworks, cannot survive on APPs, presentations, close strategic plans. They need jobs, infrastructure, access to marine resources, meaningful participation in wildlife economy and rural development-linked environmental programmes.

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IsiZulu:

Iphi imisebenzi ezophilisa abantu bakithi. Ngalokho nje, siyasiphikisa lesi sabelomali. Gwaza Mkonto, gwaza! [Kwaphela isikhathi.]

Mr W D PEACH: Hon House Chair, this past week, South Africa achieved international acclaim, securing a gold medal and the best in show award at the prestigious RHS Chelsea Flower Show ... [Applause.] ... Thank you. The bold design is centered on the life-giving role that fire plays within our unique Fynbos ecosystem. This theme carries a profound relevance given the devastating wildfires that have ravaged the Western Cape during the early months of this year. However, while this magnificent exhibition showcased the unparalleled beauty of our native flora, it simultaneously served as a stark and sobering warning. Extreme climate change events and natural disasters are no longer isolated anomalies. They are the new normal in South Africa, and this is due to unmitigated climate change. In the wake of the fires, catastrophic flooding ensued. Limpopo was inundated by torrential rainfall, which obliterated critical infrastructure, decimated agricultural output, and directly threatened vulnerable communities. The Kruger Park alone sustained infrastructure damage exceeding

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R1 billion, capital that must now be urgently raised to secure our paramount conservation and tourism asset.

More recently, extreme weather flooded the Western Cape, inflicting immense damage on public roads, residential property, and agricultural land. We extend our profound condolences to every South African citizen that had suffered loss of life, livelihood, or property during this deeply challenging period. We extend our condolences to the family of the Marais couple, who were brutally murdered in a remote sector of Northern Kruger. This tragic event marks the first occurrence of its kind in the park's 100-year history, which we commemorate this week. We must ensure that stronger protection is put in place by the relevant authorities, specifically the SA National Defence Force, SANDF, as well as the SAPS.

The South African economy is not growing fast enough. And we all know that we must do more with less. Nowhere is this pressure felt more acutely than in our response to the escalating climate crisis. Our nation is warming at a rate of 0,17 degrees Celsius per decade, double the global average. We are trapped in an intensifying cycle of devastating heat

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waves, prolonged droughts, and catastrophic floods, which fracture local economies. We can look no further than the compounding institutional disaster in KwaZulu-Natal. Years after the initial catastrophic floods, KwaZulu remains trapped in an unending cycle of failed recovery. This is not merely an act of nature; it is a direct consequence of institutional collapse, rampant municipal maladministration, and lack of political will. Our citizens in KwaZulu-Natal do not require further empty promises or superficial public relations exercises. They require resilient infrastructure, restored river catchment areas, and genuine disaster mitigation. But do not worry, change is coming. The department must act decisively to implement legislation. The annual performance plans indicate that climate change functions have received the most significant nominal growth in this budget. However, the critical Climate Change Response Fund is still not operational. Compounding this, there are also the collapses of municipalities across our country, specifically in areas like KwaZulu-Natal, that lack integrity and technical capabilities to implement such measures, but change is coming. The Climate Change Response Fund must be operationalised without delay.

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The crisis along our maritime border is equally severe. Our exclusive economic zone, which is a vital economic asset, is being systematically plundered by international illegal and unregulated fishing syndicates. The department's own data indicates that 31% of our marine fish stocks are under severe threat. To protect marine resources, we need SAPS as well as the SANDF to work more closely with the department. The department cannot do this work alone. The administration requires urgent operational support from the SA Navy through renewed focus on Operation Corona rather than engaging in international war games. We require immediate deployment of the aerial maritime surveillance from the SA Air Force 35 Squadron, which is currently sitting defunct and focuses specifically on maritime surveillance ... [Time expired.] ... Thank you very much.

Tshivenda:

Dok L MANAGA: Ndo livhuwa, Mudzulatshidulo. Kha vha ntendele ndi thome nga u lumelisa Mushavhi Ishe, Vho Julius Sello Malema. Mudzulatshidulo ...

English:

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... the EFF rejects Budget Vote 32 of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment. The budget is yet another austerity-driven budget constrained by fiscal limitations that will fail to address the challenges that our people are facing out there. The gradual erosion of the budgetary capacity of the department is extremely concerning. The previous year's budget was already below what had originally been projected in the 2024 budget baseline for the 2025-26 financial year. The department was short by approximately R157,8 million. This was when considering the inflation rate by that time, compared to what the government itself had previously estimated was necessary by then. We indicated in this very same House, last year in June, that this budget had to be approached with revolutionary clarity and commitment to the working class and the landless. We warned that austerity measures would deepen unemployment, weaken environmental protection, undermine public sector capacity, and abandon poor communities that depend on state intervention for survival. Today, unfortunately, those warnings have become reality. The department's total allocation for the 2026-27 financial year stands at R1,271 billion, representing a nominal decrease of R16,6 million from the previous year. However, when inflation

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is considered, the department suffers a real budget reduction of about R316,7 million, amounting to a 3,5% decrease in real spending power. This means that despite the government's attempt to create the illusion of stability, it is not a delusion, Minister, it is an illusion. The reality is that the department is expected to do more with less. This reduction in real resources comes at a time when our country faces worsening climate disasters, a rising unemployment rate, which is sitting at 32,7% as we speak, a collapsing waste management system, increasing biodiversity threats, and growing pressure on our marine and forestry resources.

A close analysis of this budget exposes the government's misplaced priorities. The largest real budget increase goes to climate change and air quality, which receives an additional R101,4 million, translating into a real increase of about 13,6%. While climate interventions are important, we must ask whether these allocations are reaching the poor and working-class communities who are suffering daily from floods, droughts, pollution, and environmental degradation.

Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and Eastern Cape suffered heavily. Many families at Malamulele, Saselamani, Giyani in Mbaula were worse. The little one who was swept away by floods

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is still missing to date, and the family is still devastated as we speak. Yet we see little intervention.

Now, we are seeing the Western Cape joining the choir. Maybe the Minister will start to act because the Western Cape is joining the choir. Communities in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the North West continue to suffer due to the failure of the government to finalize and gazette the National Elephant Strategy. The escalating human-wildlife conflict involving the *Loxodonta Africana* continues to threaten lives, livelihoods, and rural communities while government strategies remain trapped on paper instead of being implemented. Regulatory compliance and sector monitoring also receive a real increase, suggesting that the government is prioritizing bureaucratic compliance and administrative regulations over direct community development and job creation. At the same time, the programmes that directly affect workers and poor communities are facing severe cuts.

The budget demonstrates a government that is retreating from developmental and environmental governance and abandoning the very communities that depend on these programmes for survival. With the budgets you have tabled before this House, Minister,

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how many lives are you truly going to change? Our people are drowning in poverty. Our youth are stranded in townships and villages, carrying certificates, diplomas, and degrees with no hope of employment. How many jobs will this budget create?

As I conclude, the reality is that this budget does not prioritize the poor and working class. It advances the agenda of capitalists and protects the interests of the bourgeoisie while the masses continue to suffer. This is not a budget of transformation; it is a budget of austerity, a budget of budget cuts, a managed decline. It reflects a government that has accepted mass unemployment, environmental injustice, and deepening inequality as normal features in South African society. We reject this budget. Thank you so much.

Mr A K NGOBESE: Hon Chairperson, hon Minister, hon Deputy Minister, the hon Chairperson of the oversight committee, senior officials of the department, hon members, the IFP welcomes the fiscal allocation, as it will serve as a primary mechanism for determining whether our environmental policies will genuinely safeguard the livelihoods of our communities or whether it will be reduced merely to a compliance exercise.

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Redressing our historic ecological obligation while driving an inclusive green economy requires a well-resourced and stable vanguard. As members of this House who have reviewed these financial frameworks, our forecast must be ...

IsiZulu:

Mnu T S MJADU: Sihlalo, ephuzwini lokukhalima okuphambukayo: Ngcela ukubuza kusikhulumi esila phambili mhlawumbe ukuqonda ye-oversight ... [Ubuwelewele.] ... sifuna ukuqonda. Sifuna ukulandela inkulumo kahle

English:

Maybe, he understands the oversight ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): No, that is not a point of order. Hon member, that is not a point of order.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon members, can I warn against fervorous points of order.

IsiZulu:

... ungaqhubeka. Ungaqhubeka baba.

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English:

Hon member! Hon member! Hon member! Order, hon members! Order hon members! Continue, hon member on the platform.

Mr A K NGOBESE: Redressing our historic ecological obligation while driving an inclusive green economy requires a well-resourced and stable vanguard. As members of this House who have reviewed these financial frameworks, our forecast must be translating this baseline into sustainable, localised development, in practical, not merely in principle.

Our immediate strategy forecast must be directed towards the structural opportunities within the allocation. The IFP, therefore, seeks specificity on how the department will contribute to addressing graduate unemployment, while building a critical skill for the environmental sector.

Existing initiatives such as the Extended Public Works Programme and environmental projects already create employment, but they must be deliberately structured to absorb graduates into practical placement, particularly in the local government level, where technical capacity is most urgently required.

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By aligning environment mandates with structured training opportunities, we can provide young professionals with meaningful experience, strengthening municipality capacity, and advance the goal of building a capable state.

To optimise these interventions, we must collectively address the operational constraints that have forced a reduction in national performance targets due to budgetary limits. It is of great concern how the department plans to ensure the comprehensive protection of our coastline and keep it continuously cleaned, as it remains a vital economic and a logical asset for millions of South Africans.

This stewardship must extend directly into local government structures. Given the extensive waste management mandate that this department holds, it is equally a matter of concern how the executive will practically assist municipalities in moving past high-level compliance to deploying tangible, technical and operational support that stabilises local refuse realities on the ground.

The solution lies in fostering innovative financial partnerships and stabilising institutional capacity to bridge

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funding gaps within the Waste Bureau, and addressing infrastructure rehabilitation of our national parks, including the Kruger National Park.

The executive must accelerate the diversification of self-generated revenue. Public-private partnership, global green financing, and carbon credit must be leveraged to attract private capital. Furthermore, fast-tracking the formal independence of the Waste Bureau as a stand-alone entity will unblock statutory funding streams from collecting levies to directly benefit municipality waste networks.

Protecting our natural heritage is a duty we owe the future generation. Through climate ... [Time expired.] The IFP supports this Budget Vote. Thank you.

Ms S M PETERS: House Chair, hon Minister and hon Deputy Ministers, as well as the chair of the portfolio committee, this report presents itself as a developmental roadmap, but in reality, it is deeply technocratic and overly administrative in nature. It speaks the language of transformation, sustainability and inclusion, yet the budget allocations tell a very different story.

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Throughout the report, we are repeatedly told that job creation, climate resilience, and environmental protection are priorities of government. But if those priorities were truly at the center of this strategy, then why is the very programme that delivers the most labour-intensive environmental work facing some of the deepest cuts? The Environmental Programme under the Expanded Public Works Programme, the largest programme in the department, suffers a nominal cut of R120,3 000 million amounting to a real decrease of 8,1%. This is not a minor adjustment. This is a direct blow to communities that rely on these programmes for work, dignity and survival.

These programmes are not abstract lines in a spreadsheet; they create jobs for unemployed South Africans, they restore ecosystems, they support poor and rural communities, they drive initiatives such as Working for Water and Working for Wetlands. At a time when unemployment remains one of the greatest crises facing our country, cutting one of the most labour-intensive programmes in the department completely undermines the development claims made throughout this report.

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The contradiction does not end there. Forestry management faces a real budget cut of 11,9% while Fisheries management faces a real cut of 3,8% despite rising fuel costs, increased patrol demands and growing pressure on marine resources.

Once again, the rhetoric of protection and sustainability is not matched by meaningful financial commitment. The report itself acknowledges the importance of transforming the small-scale fisheries sector. It highlights the establishment of 172 co-operatives and support for approximately 10 000 members but recognition without adequate funding means very little to fishing communities who continue to face harbour problems, equipment shortages, insufficient research, capacity and weak enforcement capabilities.

We cannot continue praising small-scale fisheries in speeches while failing to provide the resources necessary for them to survive and compete. A recurring pattern throughout this report is the reliance on future promises rather than present implementation.

We constantly hear about pending legislation, upcoming partnerships, future strategies and planned reforms. But South

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Africans are tired of hearing what government plans to do someday. Communities need delivery now.

Development cannot exist in policy frameworks and strategic languages. It must be visible in budgets, implementation and outcomes. This is why the report ultimately struggles to convince as a truly developmental programme. It is managerial rather than transformative, procedural rather than people centered. It focuses heavily on governance systems, frameworks and administrative processes, while the actual programmes that impact rural communities and vulnerable South Africans are steadily weakened through budget reductions.

If government is serious about environmental protection, economic inclusion and sustainable development, then its budgets must reflect those priorities in practice, not merely in rhetoric. The PA supports Budget Vote 32.

Afrikaans:

Mnr W W WESSELS: Agb Huisvoorsitter, hierdie departement het 'n geweldige moeilike taak, om 'n belans te handhaaf. Aan die een kant is die beskerming van ons waardevolle omgewingshulpbronne, skaars hulpbronne, en aan die anderkant

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is die gemeenskappe, wat afhanklik van daardie hulpbronne is vir hulle finansiële voortbestaan en lewensvatbaarheid.

Ons moet 'n volhoubare toekoms skep, maar ons moet ook aan die huidige uitdagings dink wat veral ons vissersgemeenskappe en mense wat 'n verband met ons woude, met ons grond en met ons vis en seewater het. Ons moet dink aan die wat daarvan afhanklik is, nie net sosio-ekonomies nie, maar ook kultureel. Ons moet hulle ook in ag neem, om so 'n regulatoriese omgewing te skep wat dit wel moontlik maak.

Daarom wil ek eerstens ook die Minister se spoedige hantering van die koöperatiewe vir kleinvisserse se appelle verwelkom en hom daarvoor te bedank. Hierdie herstel van lisensies en die vroeë verhoging van sekere kwotas is 'n bitternodige inspuiting, om die sosio-ekonomiese herstel van ons vissersgemeenskappe aan die gang te sit.

Vir baie lank is hierdie departement en sy funksionele voorgangers deur bedrog, korrupsie, burokrasie en administratiewe rompslomp vermink, en is gemeenskappe gefrustreerd, benadeel en verarm deur irrasionele administratiewe handelings, vertragings en 'n tekort aan

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konsultasie met die gemeenskappe wat geraak word deur regulatoriese besluite.

Terwyl broodnodige lisensies afgekeur word vir geen rasionele rede nie, word ander lisensies vir erge omgewingsvernietigende praktyke deur groot multinasionale maatskappy en konglomorate onverpoos goedgekeur en omgewingsimpakstudies en besware word bloot geignoreer.

Dit kan nie so aangaan nie en daar moet daadwerklike verandering kom.

English:

Poachers and those syndicates are depleting our marine resources relentlessly. Policing strategies are failing and those syndicates operate in broad daylight without any fear. That is happening while small-scale fishers are punished and overregulated. Much more must be done to co-ordinate better with the SAPS.

The Minister mentioned climate change and it has been alluded by other members as well, especially in terms of the devastating effect of floods that we are currently

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experiencing and many people have lost their lives and their livelihoods because of these devastating floods.

On the other hand, we should not forget about desertification and that that is also taking place at an alarming rate because of climate change and other human-caused factors. The effects thereof are just as devastating.

The root causes of desertification, which is threatening more and more productive agricultural land should be combated but what is also needed additionally to rehabilitation programmes are prevention. Implementing the desertification prevention practices on all state-owned land should be a priority. And the starting point and where desertification has already occurred on state-owned land, rehabilitation should be prioritised.

Afrikaans:

Ons kan nie ons omgewing vernietig en net kyk hoe dit gebeur nie. Ons moet optree. Die departement moenie in administratiewe rompslomp verval nie, maar ons bedank die Minister vir die voortuitgang en verbetering wat daar reeds is. Ek dank u.

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English:

Mr A D BEESLEY: Chairperson, Budget Vote No 32 on Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment goes to the heart of basic constitutional obligations: government's duty to protect our natural heritage and secure a healthy environment for present and future generations.

ActionSA acknowledges that there are pockets of progress, including recent landmark convictions in rhino poaching cases. These outcomes are welcome and demonstrate what is possible when enforcement works, but they are also an indictment on a system where success is episodic rather than institutionalised and where governance failures continue to undermine conservation efforts at scale.

We remain deeply concerned about the broader state of leadership and accountability within the sector. ActionSA has formally raised questions regarding potential conflicts of interest involving the new Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. At a time when public trust in environmental governance is fragile, the executive cannot afford even the perception of compromised impartiality. Transparency and

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ethical clarity are not optional. They are foundational to credible environmental stewardship.

Governance failure is not abstract. It has measurable environmental consequences. In Cape Town alone, ActionSA has highlighted the ongoing serious pollution crisis where 14 billion litres of untreated or poorly treated wastewater continues to be pumped into the coastal ecosystem every year – 14 billion. Despite repeated warnings and confirmation of ongoing pollution, implementation delays persist. This is not merely an infrastructure backlog. It is a sustained ecological and public health failure that erodes marine biodiversity and places coastal communities at risk.

ActionSA also wishes to place on record its position regarding the welfare of animals under state care. The case of the three elephants, Lammie, Ramadiba, and Mopane, held at the Johannesburg Zoo raises serious ethical and conservation concerns. These are highly intelligent, socially complex animals showing signs of distress under prolonged confinement. Whilst we respect ongoing legal processes, we support all lawful interventions that prioritise humane treatment and long-term wellbeing, including relocation where appropriate

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conditions cannot be met. Minister, South Africa cannot claim to be a global conservation leader whilst ignoring distress signals within its own institutions.

Environmental protection is not separate from governance. It is dependent on it. When oversight fails, ecosystems fail. When accountability is weak, pollution persists. When ethical standards are compromised, conservation outcomes suffer.

ActionSA is therefore calling for three urgent shifts in this Vote: strengthened enforcement capacity, measurable accountability for environmental compliance at municipal and provincial levels, and, lastly, full transparency in leadership to ensure public confidence in the department's decision-making. We remain committed to working with stakeholders, scientists, and civil society to develop and advance a credible, modern environmental policy framework, one that prioritises ecological integrity over political convenience or narrow commercial interests.

South Africa's environmental inheritance is not negotiable. It is not renewable with human political cycles, and it will not survive another decade of governance drift. ActionSA will

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therefore not support Vote No 32 in its current form. I thank you.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Ms B Swarts): Chairperson, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Mr Willie Aucamp, Deputy Minister Narend Singh, hon Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Ms Nqabisa Gantsho and committee members, Members of Parliament, chairpersons, board members, and chief executive officers of our entities, director-general Ms Nomfundo Tshabalala, Team Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, ladies and gentlemen, and fellow South Africans, good afternoon. It is an honour to stand before you in this august House as we table Budget Vote No 32 of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

Hon members, the transformation of the forestry sector remains one of the key strategic priorities of the department. Through the Forestry Sector Masterplan and the Community Forestry Agreement Model, we are increasing equitable access and unlocking meaningful socioeconomic opportunities, particularly for women, youth, and people living with disabilities.

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In the 2025-2026 financial year, eight community forestry agreements were concluded in the Eastern Cape. In the 2026-2027 financial year, a further eight plantations will be transferred to communities. These will create jobs, stimulate small businesses, and strengthen rural livelihoods, especially for women and youth. The department is also mobilising private sector partners to provide financial support for this important programme that will promote forestry careers in our schools.

On 24 September 2025, the people of South Africa donated and planted 1,3 million trees, exceeding our target of 1 million trees. This achievement, which came at no cost to government, demonstrates the power of collective action and the willingness of South Africans to answer the call to protect our environment and combat climate change. I dedicate this historic and remarkable milestone to all stakeholders who made this possible through donations and the commitment of time. The presidential One Million Trees Campaign has been formally relaunched this month under the theme, "My Tree, My Oxygen. Plant Yours Today." Aligned to national environmental priorities, this initiative aims to plant 10 million trees,

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60% fruit trees and 40% indigenous trees, on Heritage Day 2026.

Indigenous trees are the backbone of local ecosystems. Acting on nature's blueprint, they support biodiversity, provide climate resilience, and require less maintenance and water consumption than non-native species. I am making a clarion call to all spheres of government and all South Africans to partner with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment in support of this programme.

The South African Forestry Company SOC Limited, Safcol, partners with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment to implement afforestation, reforestation, and sustainable forest management initiatives. This collaboration supports the revival of community nurseries and drives job creation in forestry, ecotourism, and wood processing through biodiversity conservation.

The initiatives that we are currently embarking on regarding clean energy include the proposed combined heat and power project, CHP, which will be linked to the planned Timbadola Sawmill upgrade. The CHP system project will use residue from

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the sawmill and forest residue after harvesting as feedstock to produce electricity and steam. An investor for the CHP project has been identified, and the project is at the developmental phase and will be linked to the phased upgrade of the Timbadola Sawmill, which is also at the developmental phase. Electricity produced from the CHP project will be used by the sawmill, and excess will be sold to the grid.

On integrated fire management, hon members, the department is strengthening national fire management capacity by ensuring forestry protection associations have the capacity and resources to deal with the frequent occurrence of veld fires. I am pleased to announce that the department has completed the functionality assessment of forestry protection associations, clearly identifying their functional and operational status and support needs. A support strategy will be implemented to enhance the effectiveness during this financial year. In the 2026-2027 financial year, the department will create more than 4 000 Expanded Public Works Programme work opportunities through the Working on Fire programme.

On chemicals and waste management, the department is responding to the scourge of pollution caused by the

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mismanagement of waste in the country by strengthening our Local Government Support Programme in partnership with the SA Local Government Association. We are committed to South Africa's ambition to phase out chemicals that harm the ozone layer. This financial year, we aim to reduce the consumption of these harmful chemicals by 97,5%.

To address noncompliant municipal landfill sites, we are pursuing the amendment of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant, Mig, policy to make it compulsory for municipalities with noncompliance notices or directives to ring fence at least 5% of their Mig allocation. In the 2025 financial year the e-waste program was launched and, through izimbizo, communities were informed about the dangers of electronic waste. Producer Responsibility Organisations partnered with the department to produce e-waste and purchase e-waste from the communities.

The Waste Management Bureau, as a specialist implementing arm of the department, is strengthening the country's enterprise development in the waste tire sector. The bureau has reduced the enterprise development in the waste tire sector. The bureau has reduced the number of depots operating above 90% capacity from 33 in December 2023 to only 4% by

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March 2026, significantly improving environmental compliance, operational stability, and service delivery across the country. In the current financial year, we aim to increase the number of informal reclaimers participating in the system by over 70%, creating new opportunities for community livelihoods and local economic inclusion. Across the value chain, the bureau is currently supporting 105 small, medium and micro enterprises involved in transportation depot operations, depot leasing, and waste processing activities, with women-owned companies now owning 60% of companies of waste tire depots.

During the 2025-2026 financial year, the department added just over 320 hectares of land to the conservation estate.

SA Weather Services is strategic national institution whose work contributes to the protection of lives, property, critical infrastructure, and economic activities against the impact of adverse and climate-related hazards. The devastating floods in Mthatha in June 2025, in Mpumalanga and Limpopo in January 2026, and in the Eastern Cape underscored that climate-related disasters are present day realities.

In conclusion, the protection of conservation of our environment is not only a collective responsibility; it is a

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moral obligation to the future generations whose lives depend on the actions that we take today. We must be willing to plant trees under whose shade we may never sit. This is the definition of leadership. God bless Africa. God bless South Africa. I thank you.

Ms J Q KHUMALO: Hon Chairperson, hon Minister and Deputy Ministers, hon members and fellow South Africans, allow me to take this opportunity and rise in support of Budget Vote 32 on Forestry, Fisheries and Environment. This Budget Vote is not merely about figures or expenditure; it is about safeguarding the future of South Africa. It is about ensuring that future generations inherit a nation with clean drinking water, healthy ecosystems, protected biodiversity, and sustainable economic opportunities.

We have noted with pleasure that the distribution of this budget reflects a continued prioritisation of implementation focused programmes, particularly those linked to environmental service delivery and sector support. However, we remain concerned that several programmes received budget cuts, with regulatory compliance and sector monitoring being one of them. This raises concerns regarding the department's capacity to

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effectively enforce environmental legislation, an issue that has been of going concern in the department for a while now.

Be that as it may, we believe that the shift towards administrative penalties is a progressive step to strengthen enforcement efficiency, but without adequate resourcing, even this mechanism risk being undermined. As the ANC, we emphasise that compliance is not optional; it is the backbone of environmental governance.

Equally, the fragmented approach in environmental law enforcement weakens the state's ability to respond decisively to environmental crimes. We therefore support the committee's call for strengthened collaboration, including the involvement of the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, to ensure that environmental crimes are prosecuted effectively and serve as a deterrent.

Recent interception at our marine exclusive economic zone further highlighted the need for strengthened investment in maritime surveillance, vessel maintenance, and interdepartmental co-ordination to protect our marine resources. However, a critical misalignment between budget

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allocation and operational demands, the fisheries management programme faces real budget cuts while expected to patrol vast ocean spaces, maintain vessels, and support research. This is deeply concerning. Our oceans are not only a source of livelihood, but also a strategic national asset. Weak enforcement in these areas opens the door to illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

The matter of waste management and co-ordination, including waste tyre management requires urgent attention. While the department has made progress through the extended producer responsibility framework, enforcement remains weak and a significant funding gap estimated at R1 billion annually continues to undermine the Waste Bureau's effectiveness.

The reality that only a portion of waste tyre and plastic levies reach the bureau is unacceptable. This directly affects service delivery at municipal level where communities continue to experience poor waste management, illegal dumping and unhygienic living conditions. The ANC calls for stronger co-ordination between national, provincial, and local government alongside industry to ensure cleaner and more dignified communities.

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We recognise the important work being done across our key environmental assets. However, we note with concern that at iSimangaliso Wetland Park, declining maintenance has already impacted visitor numbers and perceptions. Similarly, SANParks faces pressures related to aging infrastructure and climate-related damage, necessitating a shift towards climate-resilient systems. These challenges are not isolated; they affect flagship sites such as the Kruger National Park, iSimangaliso and Kirstenbosch, which are central to biodiversity conservation and tourism revenue. Without sustained investment in infrastructure and ecological restoration, we risk undermining both conservation outcomes and economic opportunities.

In conclusion, while we support the adoption of this Budget Vote, we do so with a clear understanding that budget constraints must not compromise the core mandate of environmental protection, compliance and sustainability development. The ANC calls for strengthened enforcement capacity and accountability mechanisms, improved interagency co-ordination to combat environmental crime ... [Time expired.] ... Thank you very much, Chair.

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The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Mr N Singh): Present Chairperson, hon Minister, hon Deputy Minister, Director-General, colleagues and CEOs, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to this Budget Vote, which as the Minister and Deputy minister indicated, represents an investment in environmental custodianship, economic opportunity, decent livelihoods, disaster reliance and the protection of future generations.

I am just sad that some members of this committee are so confused about what this budget means. You talk about austerity. We get the money from National Treasury. Your responsibility is to ensure that we spend this money efficiently and effectively. That, you are doing very well. However, to come here and talk about no jobs being created for rural and indigent communities is far from the truth. I am giving you facts and I am going to give you facts and figures if I only have to concentrate on that aspect.

Hon Mkhize spoke about entities focusing on tourism. Of course they have to. Entities like SANParks, iSimangaliso have to bring in their own revenue. We don't want them to be reliant on government for all the times of their existence. SANParks

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have 14000 beds that we provide to South Africans and non-South Africans, and they bring in a lot of revenue from that, hon Khabazela. So, don't decry the fact that we want them to bring in revenue. We want them to bring in revenue.

Now, let me focus. We have been hearing about controlling the weather and the risks. Our job is to mitigate the risks of climate change. We do not cause the rain, the wind, the storms and the fires and everything else. That's uNkulunkulu [God]. We have to mitigate the risks and that is our responsibility as the department, to mitigate those risks.

Let me come to the question of jobs and job creation ...

[Interjections.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members!

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Mr N Singh): Hon members, job creation remains at the centre of our work as we build an inclusive and sustainable biodiversity economy that leaves no South African behind. Six benefit sharing agreements have been concluded and more that

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120 previously disadvantaged business have received support.
Previously disadvantaged, hon member, not advantaged business.

Through Phase 5 of the Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, the department has already, and I emphasise has already, created more than 115000 work opportunities, and over 42000 fulltime equivalent jobs. Fulltime – 42 000 fulltime! Listen carefully. Providing dignity, income support and skills development to thousands of South Africans. For the 2026-27 financial year, our EPWP portfolio maintains transformation. Somebody said there is no transformation – 95% of the beneficiaries are the disadvantaged black communities, of which 60% are women, youth 35% and 2% persons living with disabilities.

We are committing this year ... [Interjections.] ... You see, you don't want to listen, because it is difficult to listen. We must listen to you, but they don't listen to us when speak, hon Chairperson, because facts are difficult to digest ...
[Interjections.]

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members! Hon members, you are allowed to hackle, but don't drown the speaker. You can continue.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Mr N Singh): Facts, hon Chairperson! We are committing to 25 000 fulltime equivalent jobs, comprised of 23 000 through environmental programmes, 1400 through forestry and 820 through fisheries. In addition, we will create, and you can monitor us because you are members of the portfolio committee, we will create over 30 000 work opportunities through environmental programmes, forestry and fisheries.

Hon Ngobese spoke about graduates and young people, and you say we do nothing for young people. Let me tell you what we do for young people and go ask them out there. Our environmental programmes are not only creating work opportunities today, but they are also building the next generation of environmental professionals. In 2025-26 youth and graduate focused interventions across environmental programmes supported 6000 young people and graduates. A key part of this, hon Ngobese, is the Municipal Environmental Graduates Programme which commenced in August 2025. We placed 430 graduates in

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municipalities for 24 ... one year is 24 months, hon Managa, maybe you don't know. I don't know. My mathematics tells me one year is 24 months. They get stipends of R9200 a month. I am sorry I mentioned hon Managa ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Deputy Minister, can you take a seat? On what point are you rising, hon member?

Dr L MANAGA: Hon House Chair, please protect me. The Minister is directly looking at me when he is addressing. He should do it through you. It is not me who was making noise, but he is directing it to me. Please.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Point taken, hon member. Hon Deputy Minister, address ... [Interjections.]

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Mr N Singh): Hon Chair, I apologise if I was looking at you. You are looking smart today, hon Managa, so I am looking in your direction.

Let me give you more figures. They are placed in municipalities for 24 months ...

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Deputy Minister, take your seat. Hon Skosana, what are you rising on?

Mr D M SKOSANA: Chair, I just wanted to find out if I heard well, 24 months is one year? One year is 12 months. It cannot be 24 months!

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Skosana, that is not a point of order.

Mr D M SKOSANA: Yes, I wanted clarity because if it is misleading us then it is a problem.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Deputy Minister, continue ... [Interjections.]

Mr D M SKOSANA: Chair, it's a point of clarity. I want clarity on that.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Skosana, you are not going to switch on the mic and scream. You are entirely out of order. Please switch off that mic.

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Continue, Deputy Minister.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Mr N Singh): Twenty-four months is two years. I hear one year coming from there. You see, I don't make figures of 108 million or 200 000 or maybe 5 million, like other people do. I am very factual with what I have written here because it comes from my Director-General.

Also, a further 110 graduates were added from February 2026, bringing ... [Interjections.]

IsiZulu:

Hhawu! Uyibuza kanjani leyo nto mfowethu?

English:

Go to the municipalities and you will see these graduates are supporting municipalities. Municipalities who didn't have anybody doing environmental work, we have now identified environmental graduates and placed them in the municipalities. They are doing very good work there. Some of them for two years and some of them for six months ... [Interjections.] ...

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I can name 50 municipalities, but not today, tomorrow when I meet you for tea.

There are a number of municipalities that are benefiting. These graduates assist municipalities with environmental planning, compliance, waste management, climate resilience – something municipalities did not have the capacity to do. Now they have these young people, and the young people are so happy about being employed by these municipalities. We will continue to do so. My appeal to the portfolio committee is to get us more money. We know that we are underfunded. Get us more money so we can deal with all the issues. To those that are rejecting this budget, we need to go and tell the thousands of young people that we would employ, that certain parties have rejected this budget and they want to get jobs. Thank you very much.

Mr A D DE BLOCQ VAN SHELTINGA: Chairperson, a wise man once said, it seems to me that the natural world is the greatest source of excitement, the greatest source of visual beauty and the greatest source of intellectual interest. It is the greatest source of so much in life that makes life worth living. In case my impression was poor, this quote emanated

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from Sir David Attenborough, who this month celebrated his 100th birthday.

Let me start this budget debate speech by acknowledging a lifetime nobly spent bringing the natural world to the screens and lives of many worldwide and campaigning for a more caring conservation-minded world. This coming weekend we will celebrate yet another century as the Kruger National Park commemorates its 100th anniversary. On 31 May 1926, the Minister of Lands asked Parliament to pass the Act on national parks. In a rare display of unity, the leader of the opposition, General Jan Smuts seconded the motion. This act brought the Kruger National Park into being South Africa's first national park and only the fourth worldwide.

As my colleague, the hon Peach, explained earlier, the Kruger, like the Western Cape these past few weeks, has been beset by extreme climatic events. Floods have crippled much of the park infrastructure with damages estimated at over a billion rand. The SA National Parks, SANParks, has been increasingly successful in recent years at generating its own revenue, in good years somewhere between 70% and 80% of operational costs. This helps to ease the pressure on the national fiscus, but

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ameliorating this latest bloat, their most successful tourism asset, is not something that can be funded from state coffers alone.

As the floods receded and the full extent of this damage was revealed, Minister Aucamp established the Kruger Recovery Fund to provide a conduit for private and international contributions to this course. As a portfolio committee, we have publicly expressed our support for this fund and encouraged members of the public, business leaders and the international community to assist SANParks through donations, in-kind support and spreading the call throughout their networks. Kruger has for 100 years given millions of people around the world profound and memorable experiences, and in its 100th year it now needs some love in return.

In those last 100 years, a lot has changed in South Africa. We have endured two periods of single-party dominance, the first under an evil regime that dressed up systemic racism as societal order. The second is that which has taken a spectacular moral victory and pawned it for patronage. Both single-party states fell in dramatic fashion to the democratic

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demands of South Africans, and now, like in 1994, people are looking to the future with renewed hope.

The government of national unity has taken the lead for South Africa's new chapter. The government of national unity, GNU has converged on three overarching objectives, namely, to grow the economy, create jobs and build a capable state. The budget before us today must speak directly to these goals as well as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment's mandate. [Interjections.]

Mr A D BEESLEY: Chairperson, I just want to know if the member is aware that we lost 345 000 jobs in the last quarter.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Beesley, that is not a point of order. Continue, hon Blocq

Mr A D DE BLOCQ VAN SHELTINGA: The Department's mandate enshrined in section 24 of our Constitution, guarantees the protection of the environment for the benefit of current and future generations. The reality we must face, however, is that South Africa remains in a dire fiscal position, which impacts directly upon budget allocations. The DA and the GNU will for

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this reason continue to pursue the necessary economic reforms to speed up growth and get people into the dignity of jobs thereby contributing productively to society.

It is the work of this department that funds some of the most primary underpinnings of our society and the economy, the health of our ecosystems, the cleanliness of our air, the protection of ecosystem services, the preservation of natural assets and of land that can be used to sustainably benefit all South Africans. We must be realistic of our expectations for this department, given the budgetary shortfalls, while still holding them to account and encouraging ambition in their objectives.

It is even more crucial in a fiscally constrained environment that each rand and cent is spent productively and not wasted. It is more important than ever that this department is innovative in its solutions and unlock synergies by working collaboratively with the private sector to achieve these targets. This department is too critical for funding to hinder function. One example here is our commitment to target three of the Global Biodiversity Framework, also known as 30 by 30. The objective here is to get 30% of South Africa's land and

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marine areas under conservation by 2036. The department has expressed that it is not currently capacitated to achieve this based on the aforementioned budgetary constraints. I am sympathetic to the pressure that they are under. However, this is not a battle being waged alone. There is a resourceful supportive suite of private investors, academic institutions and nongovernmental organisations waiting to take hands with the department if they would extend theirs.

By cutting red tape and unblocking administrative bottlenecks, by expressing our national ambition unambiguously and confidently to attract investment and by partnering collaboratively with the private sector, this department can ensure that it achieves its goals and more without additional allocations.

I would like to end, as I started, with another quote from Sir David.

The truth is, the natural world is changing, and we are totally dependent on that world. It provides our food, water and air. It is the most precious thing we have, and we need to defend it.

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Thank you.

Xitsonga:

Man N K BILANKULU: Mutshamaxitulu, Holobye, vapfuni va Holobye, vachaviseki lava nga kona endzeni ka Yindlu leyi na Maafrika-Dzonga hinkwenu, ri perile. Mutshamaxitulu, ndzi pfumeleli ndzi hundzisa marito yo chavelela eka ndyangu wa ka Marais lava va nga humelela hi khombo eKruger National Park. Ndzi ri eka n'wina, chavelelekani. Hambi eka mindyangu yin'wana laha va nga langutana na makhombo yo fana na lama, chavelelekani.

A ndzi rivali hambu wu ri ndyangu wa ka hina. Bhuti, chavelelekani. Xikwembu xi kona ekaya etilweni. Hlayani eka Tipisalema 34:18. Nakambe hlayani eka Yeremiya 33:3.

Eka muchaviseki Mkhize, muchaviseki Managa na muchaviseki Beesley, ndzi pfumeleleni ndzi khensa Xandla xa Holobye, yena muchaviseki Singh, lava va nga ringeta ku basisa ku ariwa ka mpimanyeto xikan'we na hinkwaswo leswi a mi swi vula. Va ringetile ku mi pfuna ku twisisa leswaku ku pasisa mpimanyeto lowu swi vula yini xikan'we na ku wu ala ka n'wina hi masiku hinkwawo swi vula yini. Ndzi pfumela leswaku Maafrika-Dzonga a

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va le ku swi twisiseni leswaku ku fika ka n'wina ePalamente
loko va mi rhumile a mi telangi ku ta va pfuna hi nchumu
ehandle ka ku ta ala hinkwaswo leswi swi faneleke ku va
hluvukisa. Mina ndzi pfumela leswaku vukona bya n'wina laha a
mi fanele ku pfumela leswaku hambi xiphemu xitsongo lexi mi
nyikiwaka xona mi nga swi kota ku xi tirhisa leswaku xi ya
cinca vutomi bya vanhu.

Xitsonga xi vula leswaku vana va munhu va tsemelana nhloko ya
njiya. [Mikavaneto.]

English:

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members. I urge
you not to drown the speaker.

Xitsonga:

Man N K BILANKULU: Va tshiki. Loko va hetile ndzi ta ya
emahlweni ndzi va byela. Nhloko ya njiya ma tsemelana. Afrika-
Dzonga ri na 13 wa tindzimi ta ximfumo, naswona ku hava
rin'wana leri tlulaka lerin'wana. Swi ya hi wena leswaku u
hlawula rihi. Mina loko ndzi vulavula laha ndzi endlela
leswaku lava va nga eLimpopo, emigangeni ya ka N'wadzekudzeku,

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Ndindani na Thomo, va kota ku twa leswi humelelaka laha
Palamende...

English:

... because we are not here for you.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the historic 1956 Women's March, an iconic moment where thousands of women stood united against injustice and declared that they would not be silenced. Those women marched not only for their freedom, but for a future South Africa grounded in dignity, equality and opportunity. Today, as we engage with the Budget Vote, we are called upon to honour the legacy, not through symbolism alone, but through deliberate investment in our people, our environment and our economy.

The ANC remain concerned that the 2026 budget represents the smallest share of the national Budget since the 2016-17 financial year. In 2025-26, the department was allocated just 0,35% of the national Budget, making the first time it has fallen below the 0,4%.

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This decline is not in isolation. It reflects broader pressures in the global and domestic environment, ranging from shifting geopolitical dynamics and low economic growth, to violating in exchange rates, amongst other factors. But in real terms, these pressures have real consequences. They have resulted in difficult decisions and cut across departmental programmes, programmes that are essential not only for environmental protection, but for the job creation, community development and long-term sustainability. It is precisely because of these constraints that we must emphasise the urgent need to scale up capacity building and skills development programs.

We welcome that the Oceans and Coast Programme responsible for managing the 1,5 million square kilometres of the exclusive economic zone which is crucial for job creation and economic development as part of the ocean economy, receives R614,4 million, which constitutes 6,7% of the departmental budget up to 6,5% in 2025. However, budget cuts on Programme 5 on environmental programmes are quite alarming. This programme is central to the implementation of the Expanded Public Works Programme which carries significant environmental and socioeconomic value. It plays a critical role not only in the

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advancing environmental protection, but also in conceptualising and implementing green economy project within the sector.

The Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, in particular continues to serve as a vital source of income for many families, providing the much-needed cushion while simultaneously contributing to the restoration and protection of South Africa's natural resources through labour intensive methods. Any reduction in this programme therefore risks and undermines both livelihoods and the sustainability of our environmental interventions.

It is for this reason, that the approach previously adopted to allocate a significant portion of the department's budget to this programme was both necessary and progressive. We remain concerned by the decision to reduce the programme's budget by 5,0% amounting to R122,3 million, bringing it down to R2,34 billion when adjusted for inflation. This translates into a real decrease of R199,5 million or 8,1%. This is not just a reduction in numbers. It has real implications for the people on the ground. We therefore urge the department to actively mitigate this impact by strengthening partnership

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with other stakeholders so that we can protect livelihood and ensure that no worker loses their job as a result of these cuts.

We have a critical task before us to build on this foundation and ensure that these programmes do not remain temporary interventions but instead create sustainable pathways into long-term employment and meaningful economic participation.

While not nearly enough, we welcome the increase of R39,5 million, which is 2,85%, to Programme 5 on Biodiversity and Conservation. Ecosystem restoration and rehabilitation remain essential to safeguarding South Africa's natural resources, strengthening climate resilience and ensuring that our environmental assets continue to support sustainable livelihoods for present and future generations. [Time expired.] The ANC supports this Budget Vote. Thank you.

The MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Hon Chair, I want to thank everybody for their contributions. Some were good, some were excellent, but then, as expected, some were really bad. Therefore, and I haven't said mentioned anyone by name, but if the shoe fits, you are more than

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welcome to dress and wear it - put it on. It wasn't surprising to me that ActionSA, together with the MK party and the EFF, decided not to support this budget. But let me tell you one thing. Whilst you are grandstanding and playing politics, me and my department will do the work. Hon Mkhize, you are saying that my department is not looking out for people in rural areas, why are you playing politics? Where were you when we signed over 17 000 hectares of forest land to people of KwaZulu-Natal? You were playing politics.

To the hon Managa from the EFF ...

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Minister, a moment. A moment, hon Minister. Order, hon members. Also, those who are on the gallery, you are not allowed to clap hands. You are here as observers. Continue, hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Thank you, hon Chairperson. Hon Managa, whilst you are playing politics with regards to job creation and trying to grandstand, my department is creating 116 000 Expanded Public Works Programme, EPWP, jobs. Hon Peters from the PA, while you are grandstanding and playing for the pavilion with regards to

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fisheries, my department is working for the fishing community. I have expedited 297 appeals for the small-scale fishing industry, saving thousands of jobs and literally more than 20 000 livelihoods. So, whilst you are playing politics, we will do the work. Hon Beesley, whilst you are playing politics and continuously accusing me of having a conflict of interest, let me ask you this: "Is it not right for a doctor to be the Minister of Health or a civil engineer to be the Minister of Electricity?" Being a game farmer does not place me in a position of conflict; rather, it ensures that I am well prepared.

While you are taking on our game farming industry in the questions that you asked me, let me tell you something about our game farming industry. Since 1970, wildlife figures worldwide declined by 73%, while at the same time in South Africa, due to our game farmers, it increased with 4 000%. Hon Beesley, don't play around while we are working for our game farmers. Don't play politics while we are in the trenches doing the work. Hon Beesley, you are welcome to come and have coffee with me, and I will teach you one thing or two about the value of our game farmers if you don't appreciate them.

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Hon Chairperson, across our country, we are investing in biodiversity conservation. We are expanding protected areas. We are restoring degraded ecosystems and we are supporting the ocean's economy and strengthening forestry and fisheries management. Through programmes such as Working for Water, Working on Fire and Coastal Rehabilitation Initiatives, thousands of South Africans are earning an income while restoring and protecting our natural heritage.

We are not playing politics. We are implementing solutions. So, go and ask the small-scale fishing community, the 297 of them whose appeals I upheld, whether they appreciate this. We are implementing what we are being accused of not doing. Instead of shouting, be the portfolio committee that you should be. As the hon Singh said, make sure that we spend the money wisely. Make sure that we spend it in the right places and make sure that we manage this department to the best of our abilities. Hon Beesley, I can confirm to you and I give you the undertaking that me and my department will work tirelessly every day to find the sweet spot between creating jobs and grow the economy on the one hand and protecting the environment on the other. Come and have coffee with me about

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that. You are invited to come and have coffee with me. You might take a decaf, I suppose.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon Beesley, the gestures should be eliminated. Continue ...

The MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT: Thank you, hon Chairperson. Hon Chairperson, as Minister, I remain firmly committed to building a department that is both environmentally responsible and also economically enabling. We reject the false choice between conservation development on the one hand and South Africa achieving economic growth and protecting our environment on the other. It can be done. Together, we can build an economy that grows. We can create jobs and protect the beauty and wealth of our natural environment for generations to come.

I would like to invite all South Africans to this weekend celebrate with us the greatness of the Kruger National Park. Celebrate with us the work that we do in this department. Celebrate the people that put their lives on the line every day to protect our environment. Come with us. Let's not scream and shout. Let's make a clear distinction between the builders

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on the one hand and the breakers on the other hand. I choose to be a boulder. I choose not to be a breaker. I would invite you to join me in becoming a builder. Thank you very much, hon Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Order, hon members. Order, hon members.

An HON MEMBER: Declare, Minister. [Interjections.].
Transporting fish?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L S Makhubela): Hon members ... Hon members, order. Order, hon members.

Debate concluded.

The mini-plenary rose at 18:26.