



Conference – June 2010

As most people are aware, the conference will be hosted at the Augrabies National Park (13 – 16 June) 2010. Accommodation is limited at the Park, but Jan Roos secured some of the chalets and camping sites. About 30% of the chalets are allocated for the Soccer World Cup, the rest is for our use. Booking for this will be on a “first pay” basis only. The details of the types of accommodation, rates and other information are in the First Announcement. Please contact the organising committee to pay your 50% deposit if you wish to stay in the Park. A list of other accommodation is also added to the announcement.

SACNASP

The Society is registered at SACNASP as a “Voluntary Association” for a period of five years. During the recent meeting it was decided to add a new category: Aquatic Scientists. The Society will make recommendations on the meetings to follow and we will keep members updated.

River Health Programme

Most of the members are familiar with this programme. In recent times, the structure and to an extent focus has moved in the programme. We have asked Ramogale Sekewele (DWA: Resource Quality Services) to give an update on the current status of the programme. This will be a two-part article.

STATES AND TRENDS IN THE AQUATIC ENVIRONMENT

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Background

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) initiated the National Aquatic Ecosystem Health Monitoring Programme (NAEHMP) in 1994 in response to the need for information regarding the ecological state of aquatic ecosystems. The ecological state is based on the biological condition of these resources. The primary focus is to determine the state of health of aquatic ecosystems, which include rivers, wetlands, estuaries and aquifer dependent ecosystems (Roux, 1997). The Programme initially focused on rivers in a sub-programme known as the River Health Programme (RHP) and commonly became known as RHP. The Programme is administered by Department of Water Affairs (DWA) under the Chief Directorate: Water Resource Information Management (CD: WRIM), Directorate: Resource Quality Services (D: RQS). DWA, because of its leading role in the RHP, has some unique governance elements that are critical to the success of the Programme. These relate to political endorsement and accountability, technical leadership and communication, and capacity and skills. It was designed before the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998) was enacted and it was initiated jointly by the then DWAF, DEAT and WRC. The Programme was initiated to serve as a source of information regarding the ecological state of river ecosystems in South Africa, in order to support the national water resource management.

Goal and Objectives

The goal of the RHP is to assess and report on the national ecological health status and trends regarding the riverine aquatic ecosystem health. The information generated is provided to regional water resource managers for management intervention as per recommendations.

The objectives of the RHP are to:

- Measure, assess and report on the ecological state of riverine aquatic ecosystems;
- Detect and report on spatial and temporal trends in the ecological state of these ecosystems;
- Identify and report on emerging problems regarding riverine aquatic ecosystems;
- Ensure that all reports provide scientifically and managerially relevant information for national aquatic ecosystem management.

Programme Progress

The NWA (Act 36 of 1998) came into effect four years after the initiation of the RHP. The Act acknowledges the importance of protecting aquatic ecosystems in maintaining the full suite of goods and services that people rely on for their livelihoods, and requires that a national aquatic ecosystem health monitoring system be established. The RHP was reviewed through the National Coverage Phase in order to align it with the requirements of the Chapter 14 of the NWA (Act 36 of 1998). From its inception, the RHP until January 2009 when all NAEHMP inception phase products were approved, implementation of the RHP has largely been driven through good will by Provincial Task Teams (PTT). These Teams consisted of amongst others, DWA Regional Offices, provincial departments of the environment, conservation agencies, universities, consultants, municipalities, etc. While the design, development, and standardisation (concepts, methods, processes) of the RHP is coordinated at a national level, implementation activities largely take place at the provincial level. This model of implementation has to date relied strongly on voluntary participation, informal arrangements and a fair amount of flexibility that caters for the diversity of resource realities (both human and financial) across the country. This made the RHP very vulnerable and affects the long-term sustainability of the RHP. It was for this reason that that DWA moved into the National Coverage Phase project. The main purpose of this phase was to formalize the RHP, to establish the RHP as a national programme and to align the design of the RHP with the requirements of the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998).

The main components of this phase included:

- Reviewing and revising the current design of the programme to ensure that it is aligned with DWAE's Strategic Framework for National Water Resource Quality Monitoring Programmes and the National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998);
- Determining the Programme's operational requirements;
- Refining the Rivers Database;
- Further development and establishment of Quality Assurance procedures;
- Revising the Biomonitoring short course;
- Ongoing Research and Development (R&D), e.g. the development of a wetlands and habitat integrity index, ground water dependent systems, fish reference conditions, vegetation response assessment index, EcoStatus reporting format, etc.

A number of smaller projects, co-funded by the WRC, aimed to develop a wetlands health index and to further develop, refine and test biological and secondary indices that form part of the suite of RHP indices.

Programme developments and products are available on the following web link: <http://www.dwaf.gov.za/iwqs/rhp> or from the Resource Quality Service offices.