

CONCEPT DOCUMENT REGARDING FORESTRY INDABA

1. Background

The Forestry Branch under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is administering two Acts, namely the National Forest Act of 1998 (NFA) (Act 36 of 1998) and National Veld and Forest Fire Act (NVFFA) (Act 101 of 1998). The National Forest Act has to do with protection and sustainable use of Forest Resources. It promotes community forestry for livelihoods and the development of Forestry enterprises across the two spheres of the economy.

The purpose of the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (NVFFA) is to prevent and combat veld, forest and mountain fires throughout the Republic. The Act provides for a variety of institutions, methods and practices for achieving the purpose, i.e. the establishment and registration of Fire Protection Associations to deal with all aspects of veldfire prevention and fire fighting; the development and maintenance of a national fire danger rating system to assist in the prevention of veldfires; the preparation and maintenance of firebreaks by landowners; and fire fighting. The NVFFA is intended to support Integrated Fire Management (IFM), which results in the integration of a number of activities to allow effective management of fires, both to enhance their positive benefits and to reduce negative impacts:

In past decade specific Forestry challenges have emerged. Amongst these challenges, the following have been identified as priority problems:

- Promotion of viable Forestry enterprises at small, medium and micro levels
- Afforestation of new land for the benefit of poor communities through local economic development
- Saw Log timber shortage
- Disastrous veld fires occurrences
- Capacity building of communities and skills shortages in Forestry

2. Forest Enterprise Development

Forest Enterprise Development (FED) refers to market-driven, profitable business ventures, involving previously disadvantaged communities and individuals, and based on the sustainable use of forests and forest-based resources. The Forestry Branch has recognised the crucial role played by small, medium and micro enterprises in the national economy, especially in the critical areas such as job creation, equity and access to markets. In this regard and in line with the government's *White Paper on National Strategy for the Development and Promotion of Small Business in South Africa (1995)* and, more recently, the *Integrated Strategy on the Promotion of Entrepreneurship and Small Enterprises* that has been adopted to strengthen government commitment effort to transform the economy, the Forestry branch recognises the need to accelerate entry of new players in Forestry in order to address the historically skewed patterns of Forestry entrepreneurship. To this end the Branch has embarked in the process of developing a

national Forestry Small Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) framework and a support strategy. The strategy will be supported by regional specific implementation plans and service delivery models. The implementation of these will be done in active partnership with provincial and local institutions (eg departments of economic affairs in the regions and other special delivery vehicles).

There are several areas that could serve as catalysts and anchors for the success of FED and they are briefly discussed below.

2.1. Afforestation

Afforestation which refers to the planting of new trees on virgin land is a priority programme that seeks to address the decline raw fibre supplies within the forest value chain. Current studies and research indicate that there is great potential in two regions namely Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces (39000ha). These studies also revealed that opportunities for afforestation in Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces are limited.

2.2. Saw –log Shortage

Over the last few years there had been several studies that confirmed the fact that the country is now beginning to experience a shortage of saw timber. This shortage can be expected to affect government's intentions to achieve a 6% economic growth rate. The effects of a shortage of saw timber is already evident in some parts of the country, where this is having an adverse effect on the sustainability of local sawmilling operations and subsequently pose a threat to employment opportunities and local economies. It is anticipated that South Africa will not in future be able to meet its domestic demand for sawn timber from the existing growing stock in saw timber plantations. This will affect the national economy through increased prices and lack of timber products to meet domestic demand. There are also risks involved with timber imports that include the introduction of pests and diseases, which may threaten our local forestry industry.

A strategy that recognises the present and possible future trends in the saw timber industry is therefore essential and will be developed by the Department. The strategy will provide direction for intervention from all stakeholders to ensure that the projected shortage is managed in a way that would have the least detrimental effect on the industry and society in general. Clearly a strategy that simply emphasises expansion in the form of new afforestation with the existing range of species won't be adequate, while substitution of timber with other resources will undermine the industry fundamentally.

The industry is characterised by some environmental concerns, yet it also contributes to environmental sustainability in some ways. These are examples of the inherent weaknesses and opportunities that the strategy should account for. There is a diverse range of stakeholders that are affected by the industry in different ways and as a result may have divergent expectations. A strategy should strive to optimise the benefits and meet the expectations of stakeholders as far as possible. It should have adequate provisions for short-term solutions, while at the same time providing for the long-term sustainability of the industry.

2.3.1 Prevention of Veldfires

More than 70% of the South African landscape is exposed to high-extreme veldfire risk and therefore these areas should be prioritized for veldfire management actions and allocation of resources. The country has a long history of disastrous veldfires, e.g. those in the Western Cape in January 2000, and seemingly very little has been learnt from the past. In the most recent years, particularly from 2007 until currently, the country has suffered some of the worst fires, with severe economical, environmental and social impacts.

In the aftermath of these fires the forestry industry alone reported a loss of just over R 1 billion as a direct result of fires. Agriculture was also substantially affected in that, particularly in the Free State and Eastern Cape, hundreds of thousands of livestock and valuable grazing land was destroyed. With all these recorded losses for the individual land/property owners and companies, the insurance industry was also severely affected.

The damage arising from those veld and forest fires could have reached catastrophic proportions, well beyond the confirmed R1 billion, had it not been for the collective effort of the stakeholders such as the Fire Protection Associations, Working on Fire, the South African National Defence Force and other disaster relief organizations.

However, a need still exists for further cooperation among these agencies in order to ensure improved coordination.

3. Skills Development

The Forestry branch and the Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (FIETA) jointly saw the importance of launching the Forestry Sector Skills Development Forum (FSSDF) in 2007 for the entire forest sector stakeholders comprising of government departments (Labour, Trade and Industry and Education), Forestry private companies, Academic Institutions, Training Providers, SMME's, Community Based Organizations etc. with the main purpose of addressing the forestry scarce and critical skills shortage challenges.

The forum also serves as an instrument to raise the forestry profile through skills development, education, training and to build capacity in the sector through embracing and adhering to important national mandates such i.e. Skills Development Act no. 97 of 1998, Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA), Joint Initiative on Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA), National Human Resources Development Strategy 2005-2010 and the Forestry BBBEE Charter.

The sector is still to address the high 78% of semi skilled employees and pre-literate youth and communities who must be skilled and empowered to effectively and efficiently participate in forestry economic activities in a sustainable manner. Should the skills shortage be addressed and reduced there will be less poverty and unemployment in this sector. The time has come for all stakeholders to put more effort on addressing the forestry skills challenge, to encourage school learners to consider doing mathematics, science and technology as subjects till matric, to promote forestry careers and offer bursaries, to place new graduates on internship programmes and capacitate women and

youth to enrol for forestry learnership and new venture creation programmes within the sector.

The sector should through FIETA access the National Skills Fund to ensure implementation of skills development interventions over and above the set and available skills development budgets.

4. Need for the Forestry Indaba

The challenges mentioned above clearly indicate that government cannot address them alone. The Forestry Indaba is an initiative by the Forestry Branch to create an annual one stop shop discussion forum for all stakeholders in Forestry. This Forum is seen as the brain tank of Forestry in the country. It will be used as forum where constructive critique of government performance in Forestry could be done and equally so the government could also present its problems, concerns and progress to other stakeholders.

The recent veldfires that wreaked havoc throughout the country and the looming shortages of sawlog timber calls for sheared responsibilities from government, private sector and other stakeholders to come up with working solution to the problems.

The national indaba, proposed to take place in September 2009 will therefore provide a platform for a meeting of minds with the capacity to propose practical interventions and strategies in order to prevent minimize and mitigate the impact of veldfire disasters.