

The commitment to expand SA's network of marine protected areas is in murky water, write **Mervyn Naidoo** and **Fred Kockott**

THE Department of Environmental Affairs has made a big song and dance about how it intends to comply with international protocols in protecting our oceans.

But its commitment to expand marine protected areas (MPAs), which was affirmed by Minister Edna Molewa at last year's UN's Convention for Biological Diversity, seems to be drifting in murky water amid government giving the petroleum industry almost unlimited rights to explore gas and oil.

Only 0.4% of the country's oceans are protected, an issue raised at the launch of "Only This Much" campaign by the conservation group, WildTrust on Friday, which aims to build support among public and ocean stakeholders for MPAs.

In 2016, the department gazetted its intention to create an expanded network of 22 MPAs, in accordance with the objectives of Operation Phakisa, a government-driven initiative that aims to unlock the economic potential of the ocean and provide much-needed protection.

Via Operation Phakisa, stakeholders, including the DEA, agreed South Africa would extend protection to cover at least 5% of its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), which is also home to unique



DEA fails to protect oceans

and fragile marine ecosystems. This decision was in line with declarations signed at the convention, to expand protection to cover 10% of the oceans by 2020.

But this now seems a pipe dream, and Molewa has not yet confirmed when the expanded network will be created.

Concerned scientists and conservationists believe she is being swayed by the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR), which presides over applications from companies intending to tap mineral

reserves beneath the ocean. "There seems to be a lack of logic because the DEA is going against its mandate by dithering on this issue," said film-maker and activist Janet Solomon.

Adding to their concern was Molewa's amending of the financial provisioning regulations on prospecting, exploration, mining and production operations in November.

Her move, which has also been gazetted, allows gas and oil exploration companies to conduct surveys, including

test drilling into the ocean beds until 2024 without adhering to critical clauses of the National Environmental Management Act.

This, said Solomon, means companies like Eni and Sasol, which have applied to perform exploratory drilling for oil and gas along the KZN coast need not worry about the cost of clean-up operations, if there were spillages. The potentially costly mopping-up would be footed by taxpayers.

"That's deeply concerning," said Solomon, who accused the

DEA of "clearing the path" for miners to plunder our underwater mineral resources.

"It seems oil and gas are the priority of the DEA."

Solomon is concerned about the potential damage that could result if Eni/Sasol is granted permission to drill, especially in the uThukela area on the north coast.

Eni/Sasol await an impact report from an environmental assessment practitioner who could determine whether test drilling should go ahead.

"The uThukela estuary in

particular is where much of Eni/Sasol's gas and oil is going to come from. There's nothing like it in the world," she said.

Ayanda Shezi, the DMR's head of communications, confirmed that an independent practitioner was busy with an environmental impact assessment report for the proposed exploration drilling in KZN.

"One of the specialist studies planned is the oil spill modelling, aimed at assessing the physical and chemical environmental impacts of hydrocarbons to the marine

environment. "The outcomes of the specialist study will be reported to our department for review and consideration," Shezi said. On when the MPA announcement will be made and what percentage of ocean is likely to be protected, she said: "Our department and the DEA are still in discussion regarding the declaration of the MPA. "But the DEA is best placed to answer about percentage."

PICTURE: KELVIN TRAUTMAN

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The DEA did not respond to questions regarding MPAs at the time of going to print. Launching the "Only This Much" social media campaign on Friday, Wild Trust's deputy marketing director Lauren van Nijkerk said it was hoping at least 10% of South Africa's EEZ would be protected by 2020, and at least 5% this year.

She said the campaign aims to create awareness of the MPAs' value for provision of ecosystem services, ocean risk mitigation, food security, ecotourism benefits, moderation of climate change and improving resilience to impacts of other global stressors.

"In moving to achieve 10% there is a need to support and promote participation of not only the scientists, but also coastal communities who depend on marine resources." She said there was scientific evidence that 30% is needed for ensuring the health of oceans and combating negative effects of climate change.

Areas cut off from police

NABEELAH SHAIKH

IF YOU have an emergency in the Westville, Hillcrest and Pinetown areas and call police stations there for help, the chances are officers won't be in a position to call you back if you're calling from a cellular phone.

The Westville Community Policing Forum raised the alarm last week when it established that some stations could not call cellphone numbers due to a contractual issue.

Westville CPF chairperson Alex Gloster said the matter was of "great concern".

"It has been brought to the attention of the Westville CPF that the KZN SAPS stations that have been based on a specific IP phone system can currently not dial out from a station landline to a cellular phone.

"A large proportion of the community is dependent on mobile communication. Such an essential department at affected stations may not be able to reconnect to those in need if calls are cut or additional information is required for responding units."

He urged CPFs and agencies to determine the situation at their respective stations and to advise their communities and support agencies on their findings.

Gloster said he would put pressure on the SAPS to have the issue resolved immediately. He said station managers should deal with the problem as soon as possible.

"Let's bring all support that we can muster to assist our SAPS stations and personnel until this matter at affected stations can be resolved," he said.

Responding, police spokesperson Brigadier Jay Naicker said the situation at some stations was the result of the contact for routers with the lowest cost being terminated.

"This resulted in the need for police stations to contact Telkom to reconfigure their systems. While most stations have done this already, we are aware that many stations are still reporting problems making outgoing cellphone calls from their landlines," said Naicker.

He said a letter had been forwarded to all stations directing them to contact the SAPS technology management services personnel.

"They will assist those that have not already contacted Telkom," he said.

nabeelah.shaiikh@inl.co.za

Joy as children's home rebuilt after tragedy

NABEELAH SHAIKH

ALMOST two years after eight boys were killed in a fire, which gutted a cottage at the Lakehaven Child and Youth Care Centre, hope was restored yesterday when a new home was unveiled.

A memorial garden for those who died in the 2016 inferno was also opened at the centre in Sea Cow Lake.

The cottage and the garden of remembrance were sponsored by the Sibaya Community Trust. The cottage was unveiled by King Goodwill Zwelithini, KwaZulu-Natal Premier Willie Mchunu, MEC

for Social Development Weziwe Thusi, businessman Vivian Reddy and Judge Vuka Tshabalala.

The new cottage will be home to 15 abused, neglected and abandoned children.

"I will never forget that day in 2016 when the fire happened. I rushed to Lakehaven to find eight small bodies lying on the ground. It was difficult to explain to family members how children had lost their lives in the one place that they were meant to be protected," said Thusi at the event.

She said her department would ensure that such an incident wouldn't take place again.

Social workers were trained to do thorough checks when visiting homes, including checking for fire extinguishers, she said.

Reddy said the news of the deaths of the eight children had shocked the country. "We were called on to be part of the restoration story of the home. Trustees of the Sibaya Community Trust pledged to rebuild the cottage and create a reflective space where the community of Lakehaven could remember the children. They were precious flowers that were lost on the tragic evening."

Mchunu said: "The deaths of the eight vulnerable chil-

dren at Lakehaven reminds of our failure to take care of the young. We should remember that the success and prosperity of our country depends on the education, health and skills of our children. No child must go to bed hungry."

King Zwelithini praised Reddy and the Sibaya Community Trust. He also called on more businesses to get involved in helping build their communities.

Rajan Pillay, chairperson of the Durban and District Child Welfare, said the organisation had not received the fire report into the incident, but was told the cause was accidental.



The children of Lakehaven were excited to enter their new home yesterday as they were welcomed by businessman Vivian Reddy and Tristan Katze of the Sibaya Community Trust, along with Judge Vuka Tshabalala. PICTURE: ZANELE ZULU/AFRICAN NEWS AGENCY (ANA)

Emma, Liam top baby names

EMMA and Liam were the most frequently chosen baby names for 2017.

For the fourth year in a row, Emma was the top girl's name according to the list of the most popular baby names released by the US social security administration. Liam pushed last year's champion, Noah, to second to claim the top spot.

Emma was followed by Olivia, Ava, Isabella and Sophia. Liam and Noah were followed by William, James and Logan. - AP/ANA

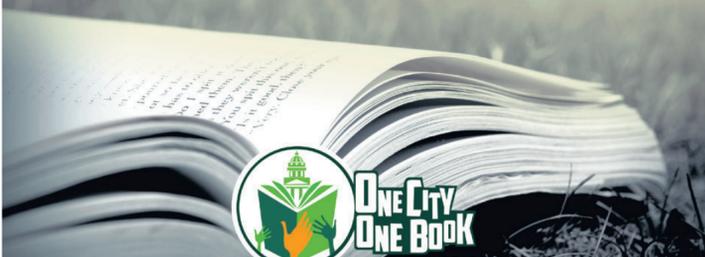



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