



## Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB): Wetlands SA Political Leader Workshop West Rand District Municipality

**Date:** 1 August 2017  
**Venue:** West Rand District Municipality, Imbizo Chambers, Randfontein.

### Workshop Report

#### SUMMARY:

West Rand District Municipality (WRDM) recently hosted a wetlands awareness raising workshop for political leaders of both the district and three local municipalities. The workshop which was facilitated by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI Africa), formed part of WRDM's involvement in the Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) project.

The workshop was held at the WRDM Imbizo Chamber and aimed to improve key district and local political leaders' understanding of the value of biodiversity, with a focus on wetlands in particular. The three main workshop objectives achieved include: (1) to raise awareness of what wetlands are as well as the services they provide; (2) to present the LAB: Wetlands SA project and highlight the key project outputs to date, including the West Rand Wetland Report, the West Rand Wetland Profile and West Rand Wetland Strategy and Action Plan; (3) to encourage the district and local Executive Mayors to sign the Durban Commitment to cement their respective municipalities' commitment to protecting biodiversity. Presentations from ICLEI and the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) provided attendees with an overview of wetlands in general, coupled with information on wetlands from a West Rand and Gauteng context. The Durban Commitment was signed by not only the West Rand District Municipality Mayor but also by the Merafong City and Rand West Local Municipalities Executive Mayors, who were all present at and contribute to the event.

The workshop was very well attended, with a diverse group of attendees ranging from Councillors and technical staff from WRDM, Merafong City, Rand West and Mogale City Local Municipalities. Other attendees included the national Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and GDARD (whom also represented the Gauteng Wetlands Forum - GWF). The event was an ideal platform for engagement, and saw attendees stress important challenges currently being experienced throughout the district, which relates to wetlands. The stakeholders acknowledged the challenges, as well as the opportunities for improved wetland management and protection, and are well aware and committed to the vital role they, as local authorities, can play to contribute to improved environmental management in the region.



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## WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES:

Political Leader Workshops are one of the key outputs of the LAB: Wetlands SA project (for background, see **Annex 1**). These workshops are intended to build upon the 'Wetland Awareness Raising' Workshops held during 2015 and 2016; however these awareness raising workshops are aimed specifically at the political leaders.

Given the decision-making role of the political leaders, a lack of understanding and valuing of biodiversity, and why it is important in a municipal context, is hampering the ability of local governments to play a more proactive role in this area, and sees decisions being made that discount environmental considerations. The objective of the political leader workshops is to improve the key political leaders' knowledge and understanding of the value of biodiversity, and wetlands in particular, to facilitate better decision making around biodiversity and wetlands. The workshops are also intended to facilitate the signing of the Durban Commitment by the district municipality Mayor.

Based on previous discussions with WRDM and the internal requirements of the municipality, the WRDM Political Leader Workshop was aimed at key political leaders within the district and local municipalities (Member of Mayoral Committee (MMC's), Councilors etc.).

A copy of the workshop agenda is attached as **Annex 2**.

## WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

WRDM MMC for Environment, Alderman Thembi Matuwane, opened the workshop with a short speech to welcome district and local political leaders and staff, external stakeholders and ICLEI Africa to the workshop. Welcome gifts packs containing the WRDM Wetland Report and Profile as well as key ICLEI tools and guidelines were distributed to the workshops attendees. A round of introductions followed, allowing attendees to introduce themselves, see who is in the room and help "break the ice" to set the tone for the rest of the event.

## COUNCILLOR WETLAND TRAINING

Ms. Kirsty Robinson of ICLEI did a wetlands focused presentation, which essentially aimed to both introduce and give an overview of wetlands, raise awareness of the value of wetlands and emphasise the wetland related situation within the district, It was noted that 50% of wetlands within South Africa have been destroyed already and that 48% of the remaining 50% of wetlands are critically endangered. The presentation then went on to provide detailed information on what a wetland is, how wetlands can be identified and why wetlands are considered to be valuable to WRDM. The presentation also highlighted the threats which wetlands within the district are facing and the role that the district and locals can play in protecting and improving the management of wetlands.

The second talk of the event saw Ryan Fisher of ICLEI, who also facilitated the workshop, profiled ICLEI and the LAB: Wetlands SA project. The presentation opened with a brief introduction of ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and the projects done by ICLEI both globally and regionally.

Thereafter the presentation shifted focus to the LAB: Wetlands SA Project. First off the rationale behind choosing to focus on wetlands specifically within the project municipalities was highlighted. Once a rationale for the LAB: Wetlands SA Project had been provided, the presentation then went on to highlight the aims and objectives of the project and highlight the key deliverables to date; noting particularly the 'Awareness Raising Workshop' held in 2015, the Wetland Report and Wetland Profile and the Wetland Video which was finalised in June 2017. The Wetland Report and Profile were officially launched at the workshop and copies were given to the attending participants.

## COUNCILLOR TRAINING: COLLABORATION

Another important element of the event was the attendance and participation of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (GDARD) and the Gauteng Wetlands Forum. Mr. Tebogo Nkadimeng of GDARD presented on the work of the department across the province, alluding to the historic change of land-use in Gauteng since the discovery of gold in the late 1890's which has had a severe effect on the ecological health on most of the rivers and wetlands in the Gauteng Province. The presentation provided a Gauteng context specific overview of the state of and impacts on wetlands, as well as GDARD initiatives regarding wetlands management and protection.

It was also stressed that the West Rand municipalities should aim to be a part of the Gauteng Wetland Forum and enhance engagement with other spheres of government and relevant external stakeholders.

Municipalities can get in touch with GDARD and The GWF through the contacts below.

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## DEMONSTRATING A COMMITMENT TO BIODIVERSITY: WRDM EXECUTIVE MAYOR SPEECH AND SIGNING THE DURBAN COMMITMENT

To introduce the Durban Commitment, Ms. Kirsty Robinson gave a brief presentation to give an overview of the Durban Commitment. Some background on the history of the Durban Commitment was given along with information on what the Durban Commitment actually is; namely a non-binding commitment and model made by local government, for local government and the communities they serve, to protect and enhance biodiversity at the local level. It was highlighted that the Durban Commitment was initially signed in 2008 and since then has been signed by over 50 local municipalities and/ or cities around the world.

Prior to extending the invitation to sign the Durban Commitment, Cllr Boyce Maneli, West Rand District Municipality Executive Mayor, addressed the delegation to commemorate the occasion. Mayor Maneli's speech adopted a very positive note, stressing the need for collaboration throughout, emphasizing how working together and smarter can yield positive results no matter what the challenge. The WRDM Mayor also pledged the municipality's commitment towards the protection, conservation and improved management of the environment. Additional key statements from the Mayor's speech are provided below:

*"In service, you need the political will from the political arm as well as the competency from the implementers. When those two work together, we are guaranteed results."*

*"The mistake that we make is to think that an individual has to be responsible. We have to move away from silo planning."*

Following the Mayors address, the Executive Mayors of West Rand, Merafong City and Rand West were invited to sign the Durban Commitment.



**Figure 1:** West Rand demonstrates a commitment to protecting biodiversity through signing the Durban Commitment. From left to right: Cllr Mzi Khumalo, Rand West LM Executive Mayor (left), Cllr Boyce Maneli, West Rand District Municipality Executive Mayor (centre), Cllr Maphefo Letsie, Merafong City LM Executive Mayor (right).

## WRAPPING UP & WAY FORWARD

Following the signing of the Durban Commitment, the facilitator highlighted in closing that the next step for West Rand District Municipality in the LAB Wetlands SA project is to submit a wetland specific project proposal to ICLEI for possible funding consideration later this year. Rand West LM Executive Mayor Cllr Khumalo officially closed the event by thanking ICLEI and all the stakeholders for attending and for participating so actively in the workshop. The workshop was then brought to a close.



**Figure 2:** Participants of the West Rand District Municipality Political Leader Workshop.

*"It is only when the last water in the river has dried up and the last fish is dead that we shall realise we will not drink or eat money" – unknown source.*

## Annex 1: Project background

Wetlands are high-value ecological infrastructure, providing essential ecosystem services such as clean water, clean air, food, medicines, flood regulation, water storage and habitat for biodiversity. Wetlands also play a role in disaster risk reduction, and their effective governance could lessen the negative effects of climate change through, for example, flood risk reduction, temperature regulation and water and food security for communities.

However, wetlands are South Africa's most threatened ecosystems, with 48% of wetland ecosystems critically endangered, resulting in an urgent need to increase awareness of wetland importance; and to develop the capacity of local governments to incorporate natural wetland resource objectives into municipal governance mechanisms and Integrated Development Planning, as well as to implement and fund projects on the ground.

In South Africa, there is a wealth of national environmental policies, however, mechanisms for mainstreaming biodiversity through all spheres of government needs to be strengthened. Lack of staff capacity, budget constraints, absence of participatory governance, lack of political leadership and public awareness and support, as well as deficiencies in relevant guidance, tools and resources, make wetland biodiversity planning and management a neglected component of our country's municipal governance.

The Local Action for Biodiversity: Wetlands South Africa (LAB: Wetlands SA) programme's key goal is to protect priority natural wetland resources, thus enabling the supply of ecosystem services, and promoting resilient communities and sustainable local economies under a changing climate within South African local governments.

The key objectives of the LAB Wetlands SA programme are as follows:

1. To improve local government and citizen knowledge and understanding (at the individual, organisation and policy levels) of the value of biodiversity and wetlands.
2. To initiate the process of integrating ecosystem services and biodiversity into local government planning and decision-making in a coordinated, multi-sectoral, gender-sensitive and participatory way.
3. To implement and pilot on-the-ground wetland projects and promote the development of bankable project proposals.

The LAB: Wetlands SA programme is implemented by ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability – Africa Secretariat (ICLEI Africa), and funded by the USAID. This programme works in partnership with 9 District Municipalities and 2 Metropolitan Municipalities throughout South Africa. All project outputs, including the Municipality Wetland Report, Wetland Profile and Wetland Awareness Raising Short Film, can be downloaded from the project website:

<http://cbc.iclei.org/project/lab-wetlands-sa/>

## Annex 2: Agenda

# WEST RAND DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY

## POLITICAL LEADER WETLANDS AWARENESS RAISING WORKSHOP

### AGENDA

**Date:** 1 August 2017  
**Time:** 10:30 – 14:00  
**Venue:** West Rand District Municipality Imbizo Chambers

10:30 – 11:00	<b>Registration</b>	
11:00 – 11:15	<b>Welcome by West Rand District Municipality</b>	<b>Executive Mayor:</b> West Rand District Municipality
11:15 – 11:30	<b>Introductions &amp; Workshop Expectations</b>	Facilitator (ICLEI)
11:30 – 12:14	<b>Wetland Training for Political Leaders</b> The Wetland Training session will address the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who is ICLEI &amp; ICLEI's Flagship projects</li> <li>- An overview of the LAB: Wetlands South Africa Programme and project implementation within West Rand District Municipality.</li> <li>- What are Wetlands and why are they valuable?</li> <li>- Overview and launch of the Wetland Report.</li> <li>- Overview of the Wetland Strategy and Action Plan.</li> <li>- Potential future partnership between ICLEI and West Rand DM.</li> <li>- Showing of the LAB: Wetlands SA video</li> </ul>	Facilitator (ICLEI)
12:15 - 12:30	<b>Key Note Address</b>	<b>Executive Mayor:</b> West Rand District Municipality
12:30 - 13:00	<b>The Durban Commitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductory presentation by facilitator</li> <li>• Mayor (s) to sign Durban Commitment (including photo opportunity).</li> </ul>	Facilitator (ICLEI)
13:00 – 14:00	Closure & Lunch	Facilitator and West Rand DM

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