

BACKGROUND INFORMATION on WORKING FOR WATER

Invasive alien species are causing billions of Rands of damage to South Africa's economy every year, and are the single biggest threat to the country's biological biodiversity. Invasive alien species are plants, animals and microbes that are introduced into countries, and then out-compete the indigenous species.

Invasive alien plants (IAPs) pose a direct threat not only to South Africa's biological diversity, but also to water security, the ecological functioning of natural systems and the productive use of land. They intensify the impact of fires and floods and increase soil erosion. IAPs can divert enormous amounts of water from more productive uses and invasive aquatic plants, such as the water hyacinth, effect agriculture, fisheries, transport, recreation and water supply.

Of the estimated 9000 plants introduced to this country, 198 are currently classified as being invasive. It is estimated that these plants cover about 10% of the country and the problem is growing at an exponential rate.

The fight against invasive alien plants is spearheaded by the Working for Water (WfW) programme, launched in 1995 and administered through the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. This programme works in partnership with local communities, to whom it provides jobs, and also with Government departments including the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Agriculture, and Trade and Industry, provincial departments of agriculture, conservation and environment, research foundations and private companies.

Since its inception in 1995, the programme has cleared more than one million hectares of invasive alien plants providing jobs and training to approximately 20 000 people from among the most marginalized sectors of society per annum. Of these, 52% are women.

WfW currently runs over 300 projects in all nine of South Africa's provinces. Scientists and field workers use a range of methods to control invasive alien plants. These include:

- Mechanical methods - felling, removing or burning invading alien plants.
- Chemical methods - using environmentally safe herbicides.
- Biological control - using species-specific insects and diseases from the alien plant's country of origin. To date 76 biocontrol agents have been released in South Africa against 40 weed species.

- Integrated control - combinations of the above three approaches. Often an integrated approach is required in order to prevent enormous impacts.

The programme is globally recognised as one of the most outstanding environmental conservation initiatives on the continent. It enjoys sustained political support for its job creation efforts and the fight against poverty.

WfW considers the development of people as an essential element of environmental conservation. Short-term contracts jobs created through the clearing activities are undertaken, with the emphasis on endeavouring to recruit women (the target is 60%), youth (20%) and disabled (5%). Creating an enabling environment for skills training, it is investing in the development of communities wherever it works. Implementing HIV and Aids projects and other socio- development initiatives are important objectives.

Social Development is an integral part of *Working for Water*, affecting all operations of the programme. The Social Development thrust is aimed principally at poverty relief, but it also seeks to optimise benefits in general. The programme's targets in 2002 are as follows:

- Create of 18 000 jobs per annum, for previously unemployed individuals.
- Allocate 60% of these jobs to women.
- Allocate 20% of the jobs to youth (persons under the age of 23 years).
- Allocate 2% (minimum amount) of the jobs to disabled persons.
- Ensure every worker receives a minimum average of two days of training per month.
- Ensure every project has a functional steering committee.
- Ensure every worker receives an hour of HIV-AIDS awareness training per quarter.
- Ensure every project allows for access to childcare facilities

Working for Water is committed to the integration of HIV/AIDS awareness into the everyday activities of the programme (through literacy and First Aid) with both a workplace and a community focus. A peer education approach has been adopted whereby individuals are selected for their capacity to encourage HIV positive persons to participate in the programme, as well as for a willingness to interact and work with HIV positive and negative persons regarding the issues of HIV/AIDS.

Creative, non-threatening approaches to AIDS awareness are adopted by the programme, with drama, song and poetry competitions and exhibitions. The

development of skills and confidence in people is critical in creating an enabling environment and allowing them to protect themselves.

ASSISTANCE FROM WORKING FOR WATER

As a public sector institution funded almost exclusively by the government Working for Water clears invading alien plants from public land as a priority.

In line with government's commitment to implement a programme of land reform and support for emerging farmers, WfW will prioritise the clearing of land identified for redistribution and programmes to support emerging farmers. In such cases, the programme covers the full costs of initial clearing.

Where and how will WfW contribute to clearing on private land?

WfW give priority to areas where land users are paying an alien-clearing water tariff as part of their water use charges. In this instance, WfW cover full costs of initial clearing. Any uncultivated portion of the land will receive two follow up clearings, if required

Where no alien-clearing water tariff is paid, WfW will generally only assist with clearing work on private land that has been identified as a priority in terms of the programme's holistic clearing strategy subject to the following restrictions:

In these instances the contribution from the landowner must not be less than the ongoing maintenance cost of keeping the land clear once the existing infestation has been brought under control.

In *rural areas, areas zoned for agriculture and peri-urban areas*, WfW will cover a maximum of 80% of the costs of initial clearing and 80% of the first follow-up and 60% of the second follow-up.

In *urban areas*, WfW will cover up to 50% of the costs of initial clearing and the first follow-up.

For landowners falling out of these priority areas.....

If WfW is approached by a landowner to assist with clearing an area it would be necessary to establish whether the land falls into a prioritised clearing quaternary catchment. If it does, then the programme will consider assisting in accordance with its clearing strategy for the catchment. If it does not, WfW will not automatically become involved.

The programme will consider becoming involved if landowners within a quaternary catchment agree collectively that such a co-ordinated clearing project become established and at least 50% (by number or extent) of the landowners support this. In this case, a joint application for clearing assistance needs to be submitted to the regional office of WfW. (Forms can be obtained from them). This request will then be evaluated by the regional office in the light of the programme's resources and priorities at the time.

If WfW is able to assist, this assistance could take the form of:

- Expertise
- Provision of Herbicide
- The provision of subsidised labour

The extent of this contribution will be a maximum of 50% and will be towards initial clearing operations only.

What are the legal implications for the landowner?

There are a range of other conditions subject to which the programme generally assists with clearing. Landowners applying for assistance should be aware that:

- Where assistance has been provided, a directive in terms of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act will be issued to the landowner upon completion of the work. The landowners will be obliged, in terms of this directive, to keep the land clear from reinfestation.
- Should landowners, after completion of the assisted clearing work, fail to keep the property in a cleared state, they will be liable to repay the State for all the assistance previously given.
- If land that is cleared with WfW's assistance is later sold to the State within 5 years of the completion of the clearing work, then the State will discount the price paid for the land by the monetary value of the assistance provided.

How do I go about clearing my land?

Landowners wishing to clear their own land, without the assistance of the programme should be aware that the clearing of land must be done in the most environmentally sensitive manner. For treatment method and approach, you are advised to visit the NDA website.....or contact the toll free line 0800 005 376
Landowners seeking assistance should contact the WfW office in their regions.

What can you do to help?

- If you own land, keep it clear of invading alien plants (see note below).
- Do not buy invasive alien plants from nurseries, and do not support nurseries that sell such plants.
- Join a volunteer clearing or **hack group**
- Buy firewood, charcoal, crafts, furniture, toys, building material, mulch, etc made from invading alien plants.
- Do not bring foreign plants and animals into our country - and do not send ours to other countries (**see research section, paper on vectors**).
- Inform authorities about land-owners who are causing the spread of invading alien plants.
- Encourage your local authority, agricultural union, school, community, etc to work with the programme.