



Willem Smith

Involvement with Sustainable Development of Coastal Zones

Personal Background

I am employed by the Provincial Government of the Western Cape in Cape Town, South Africa and is working as a Chief Town and Regional Planner in the Department of Planning, Local Government and Housing, Directorate : Regional Planning.

I was trained as a Town and Regional Planner and graduated from the University of Stellenbosch, in 1981.

Professional Career

Town Planning

In 1981 I started my professional career as a purely land use planner, working mostly amongst the poorer communities of South Africa. My career kicked off in Pretoria, from where I worked with the black community of the old Natal province. In 1986, after five years I moved back to Cape Town and continued doing town planning for mostly the coloured community of the province. This town planning part of my career continued up to about 1997, when I was first introduced to the environmental side of planning, particularly the coastal perspective.

Coastal Planning

In early 1997 I was appointed to represent my Department as alternate director on the Policy Committee of the National Government's Coastal Management Policy Programme. This was to be my first introduction to the vast and diverse study area of coastal management.

The main aim of the Programme was to formulate overarching coastal policy, specifically pertaining to sustainable coastal development through a dedicated and integrated coastal management approach, in partnership with all South Africans. The programme culminated in the adoption of the draft policy as official Government policy and was published as a White Paper on 6 June 2000.

A particular aspect, which has a direct influence on my involvement with the implementation of the Policy, revolves around the proposed institutional arrangements put forward.

I am in the process of investigating the best options for a management structure for a Coastal Working Group, as proposed in the White Paper. One of the functions of such a working group will be to act as a forum for all involved with and having an interest in the coastal zone. The issue that we are grappling with now is whether the planning or environment department in the Provincial Government should take the lead in the running of the proposed Coastal Working Group. The White Paper suggests that it should be the planning department, but the experience of another coastal province in South Africa has indicated that it should not be so. Due to the environmental nature of the issues that are discussed at the meetings, it should rather then be the responsibility of the environment department to manage the activities of the working group.



Sustainable Development of Coastal Zones and Instruments for its Evaluation

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In 1996 my department appointed a consultant to compile a coastal zone policy with a specific focus on the spatial aspects of coastal zone management. Whereas the national government's White Paper gives the overarching goals, objectives and policy guidelines, the aim of the provincial policy is to be more focussed on the next layer of detail. This policy formulation process culminated into policy directives pertaining to land development management. Specific areas that were concentrated on were the coastal properties, mainly farm land, situated between existing development nodes and which are under constant pressure for development. The policy specifically addresses those areas and ways and means of managing applications for development.

Bioregional Planning

In 1994 the Government of South Africa signed an agreement with UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) and one aspect of the agreement entailed the undertaking of UNESCO to assist South Africa with the implementation of the organisation's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MaB Programme). The implementation of the programme relies on the establishment of biosphere reserves, which are the building blocks for bioregional planning.

South Africa, particularly the Western Cape province, has since 1994 progressed down the path of establishing biosphere reserves and has already succeeded to register one reserve with UNESCO and has submitted a second application for nomination. We hope the second application will be approved early in 2001. In both cases the biosphere reserves have long distances of coastal areas, which really will put the skills of the two management committees to the test. The reason for saying this is that, at the moment, the responsibilities for the coastal zone are very fragmented and that different institutions are responsible for looking after different areas of the coast. This is a very serious concern that needs to be addressed and is indicated as one of the most important aims of the government's White Paper.

The Western Cape provincial government took a step further by, in 1996, resolving that in future bioregional planning principals would form the basis of all land development planning. This put South Africa in the forefront because, as far as can be determined, no other country in the world has adopted such an approach.

In terms of the MaB Programme, co-ordinating bodies for the implementation of activities to be performed (establishing of biosphere reserves, etc) must be established on both the national as well as provincial levels. Currently nothing exists on the national level and therefore no guidance in this regard is forthcoming. The Western Cape decided to go ahead with the establishment of their provincial MaB-Committee and has basically finalised the composition of the committee. The one very important challenge facing the MaB-Committee is acquiring sufficient funding for fulfilling their functions. As a new democracy the government is faced with other issues, needing funding more urgently, more so than the implementing of the MaB-Programme. The provincial governments rely on the funding from the central government, but at this stage no money is made available for the implementation of the MaB-Programme. The only money is therefore that which is made available by the provinces from their already scarce sources. As will be understood, for the programme to be successful, funding must be adequate and for just this reason the Western Cape is looking for other ways and means to raise the necessary money. The most viable option at this stage seems to be the forming of public/private partnerships, whereby national, provincial, local government and the private sector take hands and jointly see to the successful implementation of the programme.

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For further reading:

White paper for Sustainable Coastal Development in South Africa. Chief Directorate Marine and Coastal Management, Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Cape Town, April 2000. Website:



<<http://sacoast.wcape.gov.za>>. See also: **Key elements of the White paper for Sustainable Coastal Development in South Africa.**

A Framework of Western Cape Province. Western Cape Government, Department of Planning, Local Government & Housing, Provincial Bioregional Plan, Cape Town, May 2000.

Towards a Coastal Zone Policy for the Western Cape, Provincial Administration of the Western Cape, September 2000.

Bioregional Planning Framework for the Western Cape. Towards the application of Bioregional planning principles and the implementation of UNESCO's Biosphere Reserve Programme in land-use planning within the context of Act 7 of 1999. Province Provincial Administration of the Western Cape, October 2000.

West Coast District Council: West Coast Region, Spatial plan. Volume 1, Planning Context & Proposals, Consultative draft, May 2000.

West Coast District Council: West Coast Region, Spatial plan. Volume 2. Strategies, Programmes & Projects, May 2000.