WESTERN CAPE WETLANDS FORUM

Constitution

Approved 15 June 2005

1. IDENTITY

The Western Cape Wetlands Forum, hereinafter referred to as the Forum, is a vehicle for sharing information and expertise regarding the protection, management and restoration of wetlands in the Western Cape Province.

2. OPERATIONAL BASE

As an interim arrangement, the Forum will operate through the offices of the Urban Conservation Programme of the South African National Biodiversity (SANBI)

NOTE: Although SANBI continues to play a major part in hosting the forum, a stable and sustainable home is currently being explored in the ngo/civil society sector (GD June 2010)

3. VISION OF THE FORUM

The Forum sees a future of environmental responsibility in which the Wetlands of the Western Cape are:

a) adequately protected in terms of their biodiversity, hydrological function, and value to human communities,

b) effectively managed with regard to currently accepted best sustainable practice, and

c) optimally restored and rehabilitated where degraded

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

The objectives of the Forum are:

a) to promote amongst all sectors of society awareness and understanding of wetlands, their roles as part of both the natural and human environments, and the factors that affect them;

b) to facilitate the flow of information regarding wetlands in both professional and popular spheres of interest

c) to link areas of expertise that will promote the best flow of relevant information for the protection, management, monitoring and restoration of wetlands;

d) to debate the establishment of new legislation and the revision of existing laws and regulations as appropriate

e) to identify priority areas of research;
f) to explore strategic directions in relation to all of the above;

g) to identify opportunities for growth and effectiveness of the Forum itself

5. DEFINITION OF A WETLAND

The ecosystem-type of primary concern to the Forum, is the Wetland. The Forum recognizes that a range of definitions are valid for a range of contexts. These include the one used in the Ramsar Convention, and that in the South African National Water Act (36 of 1998) viz:

• The Ramsar Convention defines wetlands as: “areas of marsh, fen, peatlands or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, with water that is static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt, including areas of marine water the depth of which at low tide does not exceed six meters”. (Cowan, 1995).

• The South African National Water Act No 36 of 1998 defines wetlands as: “land which is transitional between terrestrial and aquatic systems, where the water table is usually at or near the surface, or the land is periodically covered with shallow water, and which land in normal circumstances supports or would support vegetation typically adapted to life in saturated soils”.

6. MEMBERSHIP OF THE FORUM

The Forum is open to all stakeholders sharing the Forum’s Vision (above) for wetland environments in the Western Cape’s. It will, however, actively seek to include representation from:

a) all government agencies at national, provincial and local level whose mandate includes responsibilities for wetland systems

b) all civil society organisations whose concerns align with those of the Forum; and

c) communities linked to local wetlands

Members will be required to renew their membership annually in response to a notice circulated to the full membership list. The primary means of communicating with the membership will be via e-mail, and renewal is intended to limit the accumulation of old and non-functional addresses.

It is recognized that important community stakeholders may be under-represented in the membership owing to established patterns of communication, the times and venues of meetings, geographical location, and other factors. The Forum will strive to widely representative of all levels of interest in Western Cape Wetlands.

7. STEERING COMMITTEE

Business of the Forum will be conducted by a Steering Committee whose members will be appointed by the Forum. The Steering Committee will comprise no less than 5, and no more than 12 members, and will
strive to be representative of the Forum’s membership as a whole. An up-to-date schedule of Steering Committee members, with assigned portfolios as per paragraph 8, will be kept on file by the Secretary.

8. OFFICE BEARERS

The Forum will have at least the following Office Bearers, elected by the Forum, from the Steering Committee:

- Chairperson
- Secretary

Other portfolios will be established by consensus of the Forum as the needs arise
(eg Treasurer, Events, Education and Awareness, Norms and Standards, Legislation, Liaison, etc).

Office bearers will be appointed for a period of TWO years, but may be re-appointed by the Forum.

9. SECRETARIAT

A dedicated Secretariat is regarded as highly desirable for the efficient running of Forum business, especially for circulation of information, maintenance of the membership e-mailing list, and for logistic continuity in the organizing of meetings and special events. This position should be funded or be otherwise supported by the public sector institutional stakeholders on an equitable and sustainable basis.

10. MEETINGS

- The Forum and the Steering Committee shall meet as often as is deemed necessary, at a venue convenient the members.
- The Forum and the Steering Committee shall meet not less than twice a year.
- Notice of Forum meetings shall be given by e-mail at least fourteen days prior to the meeting.

11. QUORUM

The quorum at a Forum meeting shall be all the members attending the meeting irrespective of the total membership, providing:

a) A notice of the meeting is circulated at least 14 days in advance, AND
b) More than 25% of the membership do not communicate valid reasons for being unable to attend on the selected date at the advertised time.
12. DECISION TAKING
Forum decisions will be taken by consensus, including the choice of reverting to a vote.

13. MINUTES & CORRESPONDENCE
The Secretary shall keep a record of all Forum and Steering Committee meetings, particularly of decisions taken, action points, and parties responsible for action. These records shall be certified correct by the Chairman at the relevant following meeting.

Forum meeting minutes shall be circulated.

No member may claim to speak on behalf of the Forum without a minuted mandate from the Forum.

14. AMENDMENTS TO THIS CONSTITUTION
• A 60% majority vote of a Forum meeting shall be required to amend, alter or add to this Modus Operandi.

• Notice of proposed changes to the Constitution shall be furnished in writing by the proposer to the Secretary at least 28 days prior to the next meeting, for circulation with the meeting notice.

15. DISSOLUTION
The Forum may be dissolved on a 60% majority vote at a Forum meeting, with notice of such an agenda item having been communicated to the membership no less than 14 days prior to the meeting. On dissolution of the Forum, the Steering Committee will be responsible for the satisfactory winding up of all Forum affairs within a period of 6 calendar months.