

**Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks MP, Minister of Water  
Affairs and Forestry  
Handing over ceremony to the Kwambonambi  
Community  
Mbonambi Tribal Authority, KwaZulu-Natal  
20 April 2009**

Minister of Land Affairs  
Premier of KwaZulu-Natal  
Members of the Executive Council  
Honourable Mayor  
Councillors  
Amakhosi  
Programme Director  
Honoured guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning. It gives me great pleasure to celebrate with the community of Kwambonambi as we hand over land and the accompanying lease rentals for your land that is used by Siyaqhubeka. In 1998, Cabinet took a decision to restructure the South African Forestry Company Limited (SAFCOL) and

forestry plantations owned by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. Having acknowledged that these plantations are affected by land reform issues, Cabinet resolved that the process of state forestry restructuring should proceed in a way that will cater for and protect the rights of land reform beneficiaries in future.

Government as part of the restructuring process entered into lease agreements, with four different forestry companies, namely; Mountains to Ocean (MTO) in the Western Cape, Amathole in the Eastern Cape, Singisi in the Eastern Cape and KZN and SiyaQhubeka in KZN.

The Mbonambi community lodged a land claim over the Kwambonambi plantation that forms part of the Siyaqubheka lease agreement area which has since been settled in terms of the provisions of the Restitution of Land Rights Act. My Department negotiated another lease agreement with the community represented by the Mbonambi Community Trust. The objective of the agreement is to ensure that the community continues to lease their land which has been restored through the land restitution process to my Department, in order to keep the SiyaQhubeka lease intact.

The Mbonambi community as new land owners of the land leased to SiyaQhubeka are to date entitled to rental money amounting to R11 234 057.71, which includes interest accrued since 2001. Over and above this amount the community will also be entitled to future rental income which will be paid on an annual basis.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, stakeholders in the Forestry sector have signed the Forestry Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Charter, a document that encompasses amongst other issues commitments by government, industry and labour to grow and transform the sector. We are already seeing some changes in what used to be a white male-dominated sector, which excluded historically disadvantaged groups and individuals. In addition there were many barriers to entry for emerging forestry entrepreneurs and communities living adjacent to forestry resources.

The transfer of assets and the land reform process present great opportunities for government and the sector to realize key objectives of the sector, such as ownership,

management and control and capacity building. In addition the charter provides for preferential procurement, which will favour the participation of small and emerging contractors in the sector.

As we are encourage the growth and transformation of the sector, we face the challenge of timber shortages in the country. .The timber resource base (in terms of hectares) has remained static over the past 25 years. It has only been as a result of constant yield improvements in the processing of the timber that the Forestry sector was able to increase the harvest from 10 million cubic meters in early 1980s to over 22 million cubic meters last year in 2008. The demand for timber is expected to increase over the next year; however unless we find new improvements in technology the yield gains will be very marginal. There is therefore an urgent need to increase the forest base by planting more trees to ensure that the current processing plants can function optimally.

For this reason my Department is promoting the afforestation programme which refers to the establishment of new plantations for growth and development purposes. Most of the land that has the potential for afforestation is found in the

communal areas of KZN and Eastern Cape. This presents excellent opportunities for communities to be future owners of forestry businesses.

To support this initiative my Department has started a process of identifying new areas with potential for afforestation. I am happy to announce that the studies to assess afforestation potential in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape have been completed and the results will very soon be shared with key stakeholders.

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen; although we are promoting afforestation, the process is not without challenges, as usually the land that is suitable for afforestation, is also suitable for other land uses. We should also note that areas that are suitable for sustainable forestry production are limited strictly due to climatic and bio-physical factors. I would therefore like to urge the community to release further land for afforestation purposes in those areas where such land has been identified as having potential.

Another challenge is the issue of fire, which if used correctly as a management tool can be very useful, for example the

controlled burning of fire breaks in order to stop the spread of wild fires; however, if not used properly and according to good practice and if wild fires are not controlled, it can be disastrous and can destroy property and threaten peoples lives. It is for this reason that my Department is promoting the formation and registration of Fire Protection Associations. I would like to urge the Municipalities both at District and local level to work with communities and participate in the Fire Protection Associations to ensure that we are better prepared when fire related disasters occur. Later in the year we are planning to hold a summit on fire related issues. We believe that this summit will help us to deal with preventative and response issues related to uncontrolled fires in order to minimise the threat to properties and lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are here to celebrate with the community of Kwambonambi as they are now the owners of the land. The land reform process and verification of claimants has been quite a daunting task, but nevertheless we are happy that we have at least reached a conclusion on the matter.

As we now handover the proceeds of the lease rental we sincerely hope that the money will be used for the benefit of all in the community and in particular to advance Local Economic Development. My Department is willing to continue supporting the community and I would like to urge other role players from the provincial government, Local government and other local development organizations to help the community to advance development in the area.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate the community and would like to wish you well for the future.

I Thank You