

**National Forestry Advisory Committee Meeting**  
**Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Isando Holiday Inn, Johannesburg**  
**3 March 2006**

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to welcome all of you. I am delighted to have you as members of the Council. I want to assure you that the Council is very important to me as it guides and informs me of issues that I need to attend to. I have been informed that there are varied skills among the Council members. I believe that you will be the kind of Council that will offer me advice for the benefit of the South African citizens, especially the rural poor. I am very passionate about this because I come from a background of struggle and I hope that the deliberations that you will have for the next three years will ensure that you give me advice which will address the many challenges in the forest sector.

In August 2004, I requested the previous Council to advise me on some specific issues. They have endorsed the Forestry vision of the Department and the Secretariat must give you copies of this vision for information and guidance and for you to check whether as a Department we are creating the enabling environment that we mention in the vision. The other important issue that the previous Council was involved in is the Forestry Charter. The Council representative in the Charter Steering Committee, Ms Mngomezulu is a member of this Council. For continuity, she will continue participating in the Charter process and will inform the Council of the progress.

The previous Council also advised me on how to deal with timber shortages and new afforestation. This assisted the Strategic Environment Assessment study in the Eastern Cape. This study identifies suitable areas for forestry and needs commitment from the forestry companies and local communities to ensure that trees are planted in those areas. I am also pleased to note that my office in KwaZulu-Natal has produced afforestation maps. These maps identify areas suitable for Forestry in each Municipality. As a Department we are in a process of negotiating and encouraging Municipalities in these Provinces to consider Forestry in the areas that have been identified. I would like the Council to assist in coming up with other creative ways the Department could engage in to encourage participation by the Municipalities.

In terms of sustainable forest management, the previous Council approved the Criteria and Indicators for sustainable forest management in State Forests. The next step is gazetting of these, which my Department will ensure that it happens. This is a tool that will tell us whether there is sustainability in management of our forests and will also assist in compiling the State of the Forest report.

Through the Charter process, I have learnt that in the Forestry business there is little broad-based participation by Blacks in the processing side of the value chain. I also know that a large amount of our raw material is exported while there is a shortage of the resource in the country. I would like you as my advisors to look into these and come up with strategies that could be used to ensure that there is local processing of our forest resources and that there is broader participation in the sector.

In addition to the above, I would like to request your assistance in the following:

- Ways of ensuring that there is skills development within the sector. The Charter process suggests that in 10 years after the Charter has been gazetted, there must be Black representation at all levels of an enterprise including the Board level. This suggests that Blacks must be skilled to take up these positions. The skills development environment in forestry presents a challenge. There are progressively fewer graduates in forestry and this needs to be looked at. I am also informed that access to the training facilities offered by the SETAs is a challenge. I want to ask you to look into this matter and give me advice.
- Emerging small growers and contractors: these sub-sectors have said to me that they feel marginalized and need to be empowered and organised so that they can add real value and receive benefits in the sector. I need you to advise me on how best to achieve their objectives and intentions.
- I need you to assist me to explore some funding mechanisms for small businesses. Funding will become more crucial for support in the establishment and skills development for the management of businesses as the companies comply with the Charter.

Another issue that is of importance to me is the lack of participation by women in the forest sector. I am aware that equity allocations for women in all aspects of the sector are too low. Women also experience deprivation in

skills developments and have no or little access to finance. Culturally and historically, women were not allowed access to land and since forestry requires a fair amount of land, they are marginalized as they still struggle to access land. The women participating in the contracting sub-sector in particular have requested my intervention in ensuring that there is levelling of the playing field to ensure participation in the sub-sector. These are the issues that I would like you to assist me with to ensure empowerment of women already in the sector and to create an enabling environment for those who have the potential to participate.

As you start this journey I wish you all the best and I hope that you have a good working relationship. I have requested that the Secretariat to give you the Codes of Good Conduct. These will give you specific rules as laid out in the National Forests Act on how you should conduct yourselves. The previous Council had requested that the Chairperson, Vice-chairperson and the Chairpersons of the two permanent Committees meet with me after each Council meeting. I think this has worked well in the past and I would like to continue with this arrangement.

I will now leave you in the capable hands of Mr Mncube, your Chairperson whose term will end next year September. He will guide the proceedings since he has institutional memory and knowledge of the discussions that the previous Council has had.

Once again, welcome to the Council and may you have fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.