

Craft Mania 2007
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
28 September 2007

Mayor
Councillors
Honoured Guests
Programme Director
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

I am pleased to be here tonight and to show my support for this important event. I have been associated with Craft Mania for a number of years now and in the various portfolios that I have held. In all three departments that I have been deployed in, I have found that there is a relationship with the craft industry.

In my current portfolio as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, I have found a very strong link between the craft industry and the work that we do in the forestry sector as well as in clearing alien invasive species in our Working for Water programme. Earlier this year I addressed a Forestry Summit in Mthatha where I said: "what is clear to me is that forestry and the associated industry is vital for the rural economy and in contributing towards sustainable livelihoods in rural communities - a goal that we should all be working towards."

I then went on to say, "forestry plays a major part in the lives of South Africans - in both the first and second economy. From the rural areas where our forests are located, to the well developed, highly capital intensive and internationally recognised timber processing, and pulp and paper sector. This Sector employs close to 170 000 people and contributes more than R16 billion annually to the South African economy. Our job now, is to see how we can grow this sector and in particular expand the downstream opportunities that exist."

The support provided by DWAF for Craft Mania and this event tonight is part of my commitment to expanding these downstream opportunities.

2. Support for forestry enterprise development in Eastern Cape

Programme Director, already my department has a number of projects where we are supporting the development of forestry enterprises in this area. Arising from the National Forest Act which promotes the sustainable management of forests we have provided for participation in forest management; which in this area led to the establishment of Izeleni Participation Forest Management Committee.

Many forest related projects were identified by the committee, and my department was able to fund two projects, namely the Phaphani Medicinal Plant Garden and Ndakana Bee Keeping. These projects were funded with assistance from the Danish government with an amount of R300 000.

The Phaphani Medicinal Plant Garden was funded in 2003, by the Danish government to support a group of 7 forest users who are the members of Izeleni community. These people showed a great passion in promoting sustainable forest management by establishing Phaphani Medicinal Plant Garden with the purpose of growing medicinal plants to support local traditional healers and the community as well as to alleviate pressure on excessive use of medicinal plants from the local pristine indigenous forests in area. The project has expanded by growing vegetable crops as well as seedlings for the forestry industry such as pines and gums; and now they are looking at growing fruit trees.

The other project, the Ndakana Bee Keeping Project was also started in 2003 and has supported a group of seven people at Ndakana. This group have been hard at work and is one of the most successful small bee keeping projects in the Eastern Cape.

For the future we are looking at supporting the establishment of a medium sized factory to manufacture wooden toilet seats covers in this area. This factory would use alien vegetation that is being removed by our Working for Water programme. We would like to target women and the youth from this area, and support their training to ensure that they acquire relevant technical know-how to manufacture goods from timber based products. We will need support from our partners in forestry such as Amathole Forest Services to make available the required raw material for this project to be sustainable.

3. Working for Water and Crafts

For those of you who are not aware our Working for Water programme was established to remove alien invasive plants and trees that cause damage to the environment by using too much water and pushing out indigenous plants and trees. In addition to the benefits of this programme in increasing our water availability and making land more productive, we are creating a number of employment opportunities – particularly for poorer communities.

Once the alien invasive species such as wattle have been removed we are then able to use it for the manufacture of products such as crafts. Examples of whether is already done include: (1) Planet Wise Products, which has successfully established itself as a home and garden enterprise employing 94 people in the operations of clearing, harvesting and production. They supply nurseries and garden centres with hand crafted fencing, screens and ornamental works. (2) Genadendal Natural Products started by Malie Roberston in 2004 and now employs a team of 8 which includes welders, weavers and contractors. They use the black wattle of the nearby river to create beautifully handcrafted home décor, which is designed by her. (3) Invader Craft, which is a small manufacturing company that makes bathroom accessories, crafted from black wattle, Blue gum and American bramble harvested from the nearby riverbanks.

There are also other exciting craft products that people are making from these invasive species – these include the memory sticks that are made from the branches of invasive plants by five previously unemployed crafters in a small town in the Northern Cape.

These projects have taken material that was no longer needed – and a problem for the environment, and they have used it to produce items that are more than just ornamental crafts but are products that are used by people every day. Through their creativity they have turned everyday items that people need in the office, at home or in the garden into a 'functional' craft - and in doing so created business opportunities and employment.

4. Craft Mania

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are inspired by such creativity as are we inspired by the creative and excellent crafts that we saw at the exhibition today.

When we started Craft Mania we recognised the real benefits that would be brought to this community by creating a marketplace for their crafts and by assisting crafters from this region to tap into a much broader – and quite lucrative craft market. I recall that when I addressed Craft Mania as far back as 2003 I spoke about the global craft market being worth over \$45 billion dollars.

We have seen that by supporting crafters we are able to empower people, improve their skills and open up new opportunities for them. The economic boom that our country is going through is having a positive impact on the domestic craft industry and I am interested to hear from our crafters who are present if they are seeing that growth, and have been able to take advantage of the increase in tourists, the global interest in South African crafts, and the increased demand for crafts by our own people.

5. Trees

Ladies and Gentlemen, to ensure that we have sufficient raw material for crafts – we need to plant trees and forests.

Today I was planting trees in Kologha as part of our campaign to plant at least one million trees per year, the majority of them fruit trees. This campaign was launched by President Mbeki during Arbor Week earlier this month, and will be contributing to improving the livelihoods of our people as well as greening our environment. Stutterheim is one of the first towns in the Eastern Cape to have received trees under this programme and already 500 orange and 200 peach trees were planted in the Kologha RDP houses earlier this week. For this province, we have a target of planting 125 000 trees annually under this programme.

When we look at economic opportunities for this community, the establishment of community nurseries for trees is an area that is viable, and will also assist us in our massive tree planting exercise that is going to take place over the next few years. Trees that will provide fruit, shade, a beautiful environment, protect the soil, and a number of other benefits, including wood for our crafts.

6. Conclusion

To conclude Ladies and Gentlemen, the craft industry has come a long way since we started with our Craft Mania. There are a number of areas that need to be addressed if we are to have a successful craft industry in Amahlati and Amathole; areas such as training, equipment, information, finance, sufficient raw materials, space to work from, quality control, and access to markets all need to be addressed.

The future of the craft industry looks very bright – with the spotlight on South Africa during the 2010 World Cup soccer, and the growth in our tourism market, as well as the general growth of the economy – we cannot but see the craft market growing. What is important is that we provide proper support to this industry so that the crafters are in a position to take full advantage of these opportunities.

Craft Mania remains an important vehicle to place the crafters of this region on the map, and I congratulate all those involved for once again putting together a successful event.

I thank you.