



MEDIA STATEMENT

Minister Mchunu welcomes the Netherlands King and Queen's visit to Blesbokspruit Wetland project

19 October 2023

The Minister of Water and Sanitation, Mr Senzo Mchunu welcomed His Majesty the King of the Netherlands and Her Majesty Queen at Blesbokspruit Wetland Research Centre, a Blue Deal project in partnership with the Netherlands government on Wednesday, 18 October 2023.

The visit by the King and the Queen focused on many aspects, including the cooperation between South Africa and Netherlands on water management. The Majesties visited the wetland and engaged with representatives of the Blue Deal project, local entrepreneurs and Wetskills alumni, amongst others.

The Blue Deal South Africa Project promotes collaborative problem-solving of water-related issues at the local government level. The key criterion for project approval is the local government's commitment and involvement in working with other institutions and stakeholders to develop and implement practical solutions.

Minister Mchunu says the partnership with the Netherlands is a critical one in South Africa's efforts to acquire as much skills as possible to realise its goal, that of ensuring water security in the country. He said, as part of the Blue Deal project, his department wants to protect wetlands and a form of water resource to augment the existing water sources in Gauteng.

During the visit at the research centre, the King and Queen saw how the water hyacinth is removed by hands and machine. Researchers are experimenting with biological control. Natural enemies of the water hyacinth play the leading role: fleas from South America. King Willem-Alexander visited the greenhouse where the fleas are grown. He watched them being introduced to the water hyacinth.

The Queen Máxima spoke to a local entrepreneur on how they use the dried water hyacinth to weave baskets and other useful products and sell them. She also trains others in weaving and entrepreneurship and she was applauded by the Queen on this initiative. The water hyacinth is not only used for weaving, but also applications on a larger scale are promising, for example as raw material for briquettes or geotextiles.

There is still much to discover and learn within the Blesbokspruit project. In doing so, the Blue Deal gratefully uses the innovative ideas of students with a passion for water from the international Wetskills programme. They come from all over the world with a goal to find

SOUTH AFRICA IS A WATER SCARCE COUNTRY





water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



innovative solutions to water management challenges in a changing world. In Blesbokspruit, they presented their ideas to the King.

The core business of the Blue Deal programme, which the Blesbokspruit project is part of, is not just about solving isolated problems. Water managers bring their expertise together and share the results, also in other regions with similar problems. The Blue Deal programme has projects in 15 countries. The goal is to give 20 million people worldwide access to sufficient, clean and safe water.

The visit to this Blue Deal project is the first part of their three-day state visit to South Africa. The wetland suffers from poor water quality boosted by the massive growth of water hyacinth, an invasive aquatic plant. The royal couple is enthusiastic about the creative solutions that South African and Dutch water managers, together, are exploring in combating the water hyacinth.

The Crocodile River Project, Vredefort Dome/Parys Project, Blesbokspruit Project, Msunduzi River Project, and Theewaterskloof Project are the five (5) initiatives that are benefiting from the programme.

South Africa and the Netherlands have an excellent and longstanding cooperation on water management. This cooperation includes a broad range of topics including water supply, sanitation and water governance, as well as climate change adaptation and drought challenges. RSA and Netherlands reaffirmed this relation in water resources management by signing a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on March 22, 2023, at the United Nations Water Conference to create a framework for cooperation between the two nations.

END

Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation

For more information, contact Wisane Mavasa, Spokesperson for the Department of Water and Sanitation on 060 561 8935

For media releases, speeches and news visit the Water & Sanitation portal at: www.dws.gov.za

SOUTH AFRICA IS A WATER SCARCE COUNTRY



Department of Water and Sanitation South Africa



DWS RSA