

THE HARTENBOS AND KLEIN BRAK RIVER SYSTEMS

A SUMMARY OF THE 2003 STATE-OF-RIVERS REPORT

WHAT IS RIVER HEALTH?

River health refers to the ecological condition of a river in the same way that "health" refers to the condition of a person or an economy.

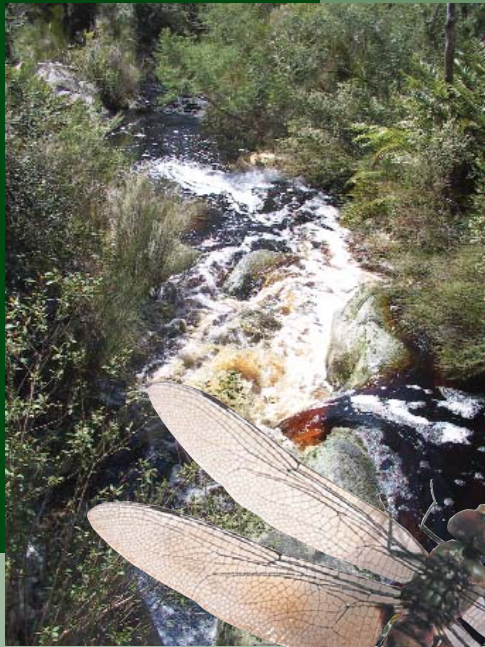
The River Health Programme (RHP) assesses the biological (e.g. fish, aquatic invertebrates and riparian vegetation) and habitat integrity of rivers. This assessment enables reporting on the ecological state (health) of our river systems in an objective and scientifically sound manner.

WHAT IS THE RIVER HEALTH PROGRAMME?

As the custodian of water resources, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) is responsible for the protection of the health of aquatic ecosystems and to ensure their sustainable use.

The RHP is a collaborative venture. At the national level, DWAF leads the process while the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Water Research Commission and the CSIR are all actively involved.

Implementation of the RHP is co-ordinated at provincial level and collaboration plays an important role. Each province has a network of implementers who work together under the leadership of a Provincial Champion. The protocols, tools and procedures that make up the RHP are available to any institution that would like to become involved in river health monitoring.



RIVER HEALTH PROGRAMME

WHY MONITOR AND REPORT ON RIVER HEALTH?

Water resources in South Africa are limited and the effective management thereof is critically important for the sustainable development of the country. It is projected that South Africa will experience water stress or water scarcity by 2025 under all United Nations population growth projections. The annual average amount of water available per person in South Africa has been projected to decrease by more than 50% from 1,317 m³ in 1990 to 683 m³ in 2025. With these impending water shortages, it is important that we find new and innovative ways of monitoring and managing this valuable resource.

Rivers contribute to human wellbeing and economic growth through the following goods and services:

- food and medicinal plants
- water use (e.g. agricultural, industrial and domestic)
- tourism, recreational and cultural use
- increased property values

Knowledge of the impacts on a river provides insight to why the river is at its present health. Examples of human activities that can impact on rivers include:

- water abstraction
- disturbance to river-bank and -bed (e.g. dam and bridge construction in rivers; presence of invasive alien fauna and flora)
- development below the 1 in 50 year floodline (e.g. housing, sand mining, vineyards)
- discharge of waste water or effluent of poor quality

Systematic collection and reporting of data is needed for the management of aquatic ecosystems. Information from the RHP allows for the identification of those areas where unacceptable ecological deterioration is taking place and informs decision-makers about management actions needed to achieve an improved level of river health.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Water is precious – use it sparingly and wisely
- Use fertilizers and pesticides in an environmentally friendly manner
- Avoid using bulldozers on river banks or in rivers
- Remove chopped down alien plants and trees from river banks to prevent increased damage when flooding occurs
- Do not dump litter, garbage or building rubble on river banks or in rivers
- Permission is needed to bulldoze rivers, sink boreholes and build dams
- For guidance regarding river and catchment issues, consult local offices at the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board (Tel: 044-874-2160) and Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (Bellville Regional Office, Tel: 021-946-4100). We are here to help you.



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