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Western Cape introduces groundbreaking policy

27 January 2009

The Western Cape Provincial Government is the first provincial authority on the continent to pioneer a strategy and action plan in response to climate change, says provincial Minister of Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning Pierre Uys.

The Western Cape Provincial Strategy and Action Plan was launched on Tuesday, 27 January 2009 in Milnerton. The main aim of this comprehensive document is to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses that speed up the effects of global warming, to mitigate the resultant effects and adaptation.

Premier Lynne Brown opened the event where leading climate change experts gave a provincial overview, and Minister Uys unveiled the Western Cape Strategy and Action Plan. Premier Lynne Brown and her cabinet approved the strategy and action plan in November 2008. The strategy and action plan build on a study to determine the susceptibility of the Western Cape to global warming that will and is already affecting the province, and will be one of the most detrimentally impacted regions of the country.

The Western Cape is leading the way provincially in an area of international interest. Climate change affects everyone and all individuals need to work to reduce, reuse and recycle in the common good of the region and the planet. Some of the impacts that exposed the vulnerability of the Western Cape with its vast shoreline are floods in areas like the Overberg and Southern Cape, unusual spells of droughts with drier soils and reduced rainfall, conditions conducive to big wildfires, declining water levels inland, long term rising of sea levels and with extreme or erratic weather conditions. Even the Cape Floral Kingdom came under pressure with fynbos dieback due to heavy rains in the Outeniqua Mountains.

The Western Cape Provincial Government, the public and experts have joined forces with the strategy and action plan to respond efficiently and effectively to the challenges climate change brings and that would impact on wine and other farming, tourism, environmental resources like scarce water and quality air as well as trade across the province.

The Western Cape has already started various initiatives to reduce the dependency on fossil fuels, harnessing alternative energy sources that are renewable and sustainable, reducing waste, training teachers to assist the next generations to deal with the new challenges and to recognise opportunities that arise from a change in course.

This government also undertake exemplary action steps such as greening offices or the workplace for savings, an energy audit with a view to reduce its usage, putting up moveable ambient air quality monitoring stations across the province, the roll out of 1000 solar geysers to poorer communities and promoting renewable energy. As a caring and responsive government, the Western Cape plans to play a leading stewardship role.

In this regard legislation may follow to ensure more sustainability, a green procurement policy, a dedicated climate change unit in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, a desk to deal with a clean development mechanism and intergovernmental relation building to work towards mitigation.

Focus will be on the poor and most vulnerable, partnerships, minimising the adverse impacts, to position the province to take advantage of emerging economic prospects, developing energy efficiency options and practical actions (such as in land use and development planning and in constructing energy efficient buildings).

"We all have to change our behaviour, activities and attitudes. I challenge every citizen to take hands with this provincial government in its target to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels with 15% over about five years and increase total consumption from renewable energy sources by 15%. Every one should reduce personal consumption in this regard. We all have to adapt now,."Minister Uys says.

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