

Dept to Finalise National Climate Policy

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The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) is to finalise the updated Greenhouse Gas Inventory that will inform its first ever Long Term National Climate Policy.

The plan is expected to be published in the 2008/9 financial year, Environmental Affairs and Tourism Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk said on Tuesday, during his department's budget vote speech in the National Assembly. "This process will outline the range of ambitious but realistic scenarios of future climate action, notably long-term emissions scenarios and their cost implications," he said.

The 2007 G-8 Summit currently underway in Heiligendamm, Germany is expected to deal with issues including climate change, as well as development commitments made to Africa. It is themed: "Growth and Responsibility, with a focus on key global challenges: the world economy and Africa's economic, political and social development."

South Africa's roadmap for a national climate policy, explained the minister, recognises that the solution to the critical challenges of climate change should be addressed through integrated government planning.

This, he explained that should be done in collaboration with stakeholders through the National Climate Change Committee (NCCC) and a strengthened multilateral regime.

To this end, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Climate Change led by DEAT initiated the Long Term Mitigation Scenario (LTMS) process.

He also said that various national departments, provinces and cities are refining their sector plans in line with the National Climate Change Response Strategy.

"DEAT will also initiate a process that will, over the next few years, match our efforts on the mitigation scenario building process," Minister van Schalkwyk said. He said this will culminate in a National Adaptation Plan.

Nature based tourism and wildlife according to Mr van Schalkwyk were cited by about 30 percent of international visitors as key attractions in conservation areas and beyond.

"With tourism contributing just over 8 percent to our GDP, the economic impact of climate change on tourism could be very large indeed. "Globally, by mid century, 20 percent to 30 percent of plant and animal species are likely to be at increased risk of extinction as a result of climate change," he said.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicated that between 25 percent and 40 percent of animal species in national parks will see further increases in threat status.

"South African Fynbos and the Succulent Karoo ecosystem seem particularly vulnerable and for a mean global temperature increase of between 2 and 3°C during this century, we stand to lose between 50 percent and 65 percent of our unique Fynbos.

"In order to conserve our magnificent heritage and key environmental assets, and ensure that these are passed on intact to the children and grandchildren of our nation, and indeed the world, we have to recognise that our knowledge base is incomplete," added Mr van Schalkwyk.

Minister van Schalkwyk also said they will also focus on enhancing research on the impacts of climate change on key environmental assets and biodiversity management on land and in oceans.

This will inform ecosystem planning, biodiversity management, the management of marine resources, park management and climate change adaptive plans.