

Climate change chief visits Nuwejaars Wetland SMA

October, 2011: The German government's international climate finance chief, Norbert Gorissen, visited the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area (SMA) late in October. The visit allowed Gorissen to see the climate change adaptation projects undertaken by the SMA over the past two years.

The SMA received funding from the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) in 2009. The BMU is a member of the International Climate Initiative – and Gorissen is responsible for the implementation of this Initiative.

The €2-million grant from the BMU was crucial in allowing the SMA venture launch its first formal biodiversity conservation projects, with these projects linked to climate change adaptation and mitigation. Through the funding, the SMA venture cleared aliens, rehabilitated wetlands and reintroduced game that had become extinct in the area in previous centuries. Crucial to this was developing fire management and veld management plans.

Gorissen was accompanied by Nik Sekhran and Caroline Petersen, both from the United Nations Development Programme, and Anthony Mills, managing director at C4 EcoSolutions.

According to Mills during the visit, the Western Cape is facing a water crisis. "Officials in Cape Town who know of this looming crisis are very worried, and are putting plans in place to try and alleviate the problem." He said the Agulhas Plain, where the SMA is situated, is also likely to be hard hit by climate change, with the region set to experience more frequent fires and floods. "That's why wetland rehabilitation projects, such as those undertaken by the SMA, are crucial."

As part of the climate change project, the SMA venture sought to re-establish and rehydrate peat, which is known to store water and carbon. 'Eco-log' structures, made up of chipped alien material, were placed in damaged wetlands to achieve this. This material forms the basis of peat, which when hydrated, stores carbon (as opposed to dried peat, which releases carbon into the atmosphere, thereby facilitating further global warming). The structures also created tiny dams, which are ideal habitats for rare fish species such as the redfin minnow. The SMA venture also planted indigenous vegetation, which is better able to withstand floods. Gorissen voiced his satisfaction with the SMA's achievements over the past two years.

Gorissen joined the BMU in 1999. He is also involved in designing the Green Climate Fund for the UN Climate Change Conference, along with South Africa's Trevor Manuel. This fund will support projects in developing countries. It has pledges from projects totaling \$30-billion by next year, and \$100-billion per year by 2020.

Picture caption (from left)

Nik Sekhran, Mick D'Alton (SMA), Dr Anthony Mills, Caroline Petersen, Dr Norbert Gorissen, Lesley Richardson (Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative), Rory Allardice (SMA) and Dr Gorissen's daughter, Annemarie Gorissen.