

Nuwejaars SMA Vice-Chair Wins Major Conservation Award

The Vice-Chairman of the Nuwejaars Wetland Special Management Area (SMA) has won the CAPE 2010 Fynbos Conservation Award. Mick D'Alton becomes the first winner of the coveted prize from the Overberg region. He's one of just three conservationists selected for his contribution to conservation in the region.

D'Alton, 66, serves as the SMA's conservation and fynbos advisor. The Fynbos (translated as fine-bush) Biome, or Cape Floristic Region (CFR) contains 9,600 recorded plant species with 70% of them found nowhere else in the world. Many of these endemic fynbos plants are found only within the Special Management Area and surrounds, and are listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's critically endangered list. The Nuwejaars SMA members are working to protect the remaining fynbos and wetlands, while not altering their farming operations.

D'Alton received his award at a Cape Action For People And The Environment (CAPE) function at Kirstenbosch in Cape Town on Thursday 6 May. According to Dr Mandy Barnett, Director of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) Fynbos Programme, the awards recognise outstanding contributions and achievements within the broad biodiversity conservation community.

D'Alton was rewarded for his "legacy to biodiversity conservation", according to CAPE. He has offered a "durable and sustainable contribution, drawing new communities into conservation efforts with innovative and creative ideas".

This includes his leading role in setting up the Nuwejaars SMA, along with the other founding members. The Nuwejaars SMA is a pioneer project – which authorities hope will serve as a conservation framework for similar projects across the country.

D'Alton said, "This is a great honour. Now hopefully we'll also see lots of recognition for all the hard work we've put into creating the Nuwejaars SMA. The SMA truly is a one of a kind globally. We're aiming to benefit our local economy and create jobs, while protecting our threatened wetlands and fynbos."

Representatives from the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank were also present at the ceremony. Both organisations paid tribute to CAPE's innovative work – which includes the SMA concept. According to them, they're hoping to take the ground-breaking initiatives to their other conservation programmes globally.

CAPE presents the awards annually to those who've made "exceptional contributions to biodiversity conservation in the Cape Floristic Region". The CFR includes the region from the Cederburg, around the Western Cape coast, and up to the Nelson Mandela Metropole in the Eastern Cape. An independent panel of judges selected the winners.