

Chamber coalition aims to tackle NMB Metro's climate change challenges

The Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber has established a business coalition with the aim of tackling the city's response to its projected climate change challenges.



Dr Andrew Muir, CEO of the Wilderness Foundation Africa. | Source: Supplied

This follows an outcome of its think tank initiative which saw Dr Andrew Muir, a well-respected environmentalist who leads the Wilderness Foundation Africa, being requested to conduct a rapid assessment to assess how climate change will impact Nelson Mandela Bay. Muir actively serves in the Chamber's Board as its immediate past president.

Given his findings, the chamber has decided to establish an Eastern Cape Climate Change Coalition to be led by Muir. The Business Chamber president Loyiso Dotwana, Chamber CEO Denise Van Huyssteen, Volkswagen South Africa CEO Dr Robert Cisek and Jacques Vermeulen, the CEO of Coca-Cola Beverages Africa, will support him in this role.

Metro-based mitigation strategy crucial to tackling climate change

Muir's study provides an outlook from 2021 to 2040, and highlights the impact that extreme storm surges, rising sea levels and temperature increases will have on Nelson Mandela Bay. Among the key areas of concern is the potential scarcity of water in the years to come, especially for the increasing number of residents in informal settlements.

It also delves into the potential collapse of coral reefs and other marine and coastal tourist attractions such as penguin, shark and whale watching, which will negatively impact the tourism and maritime sectors.



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“As such, a metro-based climate change mitigation and adaptation strategy must be developed and implemented. We need to put a multi-stakeholder climate task team in place which should comprise participation from the municipality, the provincial government, the university, business stakeholders, youth formations, women groups and others, to urgently address this threat to our city,” Muir said.

Some of the proposed action plans include spatial land-use planning which must be adapted to prohibit or restrict new construction or infrastructure along areas predicted to be affected by sea-level rise and or flooding. It also suggests that the municipality should ring fence vacant land that might be at risk of climate change impacts free from development.

Expanding municipal initiatives could limit infrastructural damage

Furthermore, Muir recommends that the Nelson Mandela Bay Business Chamber and the municipality’s initiative of Adopt a Sub-Station should be expanded to include other vital infrastructure such as roads and water to limit the impact of infrastructural damage due to storm surges.

He added that an important measure to deal with rising sea-levels and storm surges would be to install and increase the number of soft buffers such as rehabilitating coastal dunes with dune vegetation and giant sandbags.

“Additionally the Baakens River Valley, Swartkops and other river systems in Nelson Mandela Bay must be cleared of all alien vegetation to act as a local carbon sink and natural barrier to flooding events and thereby mitigate damage to nearby built-up areas,” he said.



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The procurement of local renewable energy will also become essential to reduce the impact of extreme weather events in terms of damage to power grids and other bulk infrastructure. “This also offers the opportunity to grow local businesses and keep local money circulating,” Muir added.

Muir said the next step would be to engage with the relevant stakeholders and ensure that there is a common understanding of the very serious threat which climate change poses to the province and city.

“Once this alignment has happened, we need to implement the required actions and urgently begin to adapt and strengthen the capabilities of our city to withstand the impact of climate change,” he concluded.

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