

GIB calls on private landowners to action against EC's invasive alien plant species

Following the Department of Environmental Affairs contract renewal with the Gamtoos Irrigation Board (GIB) to roll out the province-wide *Working For* Natural Resource Management programmes - a move to sustain 2,000 jobs throughout the Eastern Cape annually - the board has called on private landowners to take interest in alien invasive plant species which are robbing the Eastern Cape's supply dams of critical run-off from rains.



Image Supplied.

In addition to job creation, the contract also seeks to clear non-indigenous vegetation in a bid to maximise run-off to the province's dams amid increasingly crippling drought conditions.

Under the new three-year contract, GIB will manage four major project categories – **Working for Water, Wetlands, Forestry and Ecosystems**. The renewal confirms GIB's status as a trusted regional service provider, responsible for managing various water-related projects on behalf of national government since 1999. Its project footprint extends across the province – from Tsitsikamma in the west to Lusikisiki in the east and north to Matatiele.

Over the past five years, GIB contractors have cleared a total of 547,697 hectares of alien invasive plants. One hectare covers roughly the same area as an international rugby field.

Keeping land clear

"While funding for this is, in part, covered under the new contract, a lot more money is needed to have the desired impact," said Rienette Colesky, GIB financial and HR manager.

"Should more private landowners come to the party to contribute to these costs, we would be able to clear more land, faster," Colesky said, adding that where landowners contributed towards the cost of clearing, they were also more committed to keeping their land clear of these alien "invasives".

Colesky added that the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Nemba) required landowners to keep their land free from alien invasive plants. "The government can subsidise only so much. We need clean catchments, but we can only do it with public-private partnerships."

"It is vitally important for us to be involved in poverty alleviation, while at the same time improving flow of water into the dams, which is now more important than ever, in view of the crippling drought," added Pierre Joubert, GIB chief executive officer.

The board enlists the services of over 300 SMME contractors annually to assist with project implementation. Employing an average of 11 employees per team, this creates a positive economic impact for at least 3, 000 additional beneficiaries and their households.

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