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SUSTAINABILITY NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2024

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NATIONAL

CONTROVERSIAL HERBICIDE SPRAYED ONTO VAAL RIVER – In an attempt to rid the Vaal River of its blanket of invasive water lettuce and hyacinth flora, Rand Water initiated the spraying of the affected areas of the river with a controversial glyphosate herbicide. Water lettuce exploded along the Vaal River in December 2023, causing residents to urgently find a solution to deal with the ever-growing plants. Water lettuce, an invasive plant species, has been identified as a significant threat to the ecosystem of the river, prompting authorities to take action. Rand Water was given an urgent general authorisation by the Department of Water and Sanitation to begin an integrated approach to manage the water lettuce, which includes physical removal, biocontrol and chemical application, as advised by experts by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE). However, this decision has sparked criticism from various stakeholders, with critics urging for a cautious approach to be taken. The herbicide application, while aimed at controlling the spread of water lettuce, has raised concerns among environmentalists and advocacy groups regarding its potential adverse effects. The concerned groups emphasise the necessity of thorough monitoring to assess the impact of the herbicide not only on the targeted plants but also on the broader aquatic environment. Of particular concern is the potential harm to other aquatic flora and fauna, as well as the overall water quality of the Vaal River. In response to these concerns, some advocates are calling for alternative methods of managing invasive species that minimize ecological risks. These alternative approaches may include biological control methods or manual removal techniques, which could potentially achieve the desired outcomes without resorting to potentially harmful chemicals. As the spraying of the herbicide continues, there is a growing consensus among stakeholders for transparent and comprehensive monitoring protocols to be put in place. This would enable authorities to assess the effectiveness of the herbicide treatment while also ensuring that any negative impacts on the environment are promptly identified and mitigated.

[Source: Daily Maverick dated 15 February 2024](#)

NEW SA CLIMATE CHANGE FUND TO HELP SAFEGUARD INFRASTRUCTURE – President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced the establishment of a climate change response fund during his State of the Nation address held on 8 February 2024, aimed at safeguarding SA infrastructure from climate-related damage. Barbara Creecy, Minister of the Department Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment emphasized the fund's goal to mitigate loss and damage from climate events and enhance resilience. The fund will support initiatives such as restoring infrastructure damaged by extreme weather. Creecy assured that the fund, which will be administered similarly to the Covid-19 fund, will have adequate oversight to prevent misuse. The initiative follows reports of 2023 being the hottest year on record, underscoring the urgency of addressing climate change. South Africa's establishment of the fund is praised as an opportunity to develop a model for international adaptation financing, particularly through partnerships such as the Just Energy Transition Partnership.

[Source: Mail & Guardian dated 16 February 2024](#)

SA MINING SECTOR NEEDS URGENT POLICY REFORM – Uncertainty in South Africa's mining policies is discouraging investors from investing in South Africa's mining sector and emphasizes the need for structural reform to restore the sector's competitiveness. Ian Woodley, a resources analyst at Old Mutual Investment Group, stressed that South Africa lacks a secure investment environment and an attractive fiscal regime necessary to attract investment into the sector. Despite the mining sector's historical significance in contributing to South Africa's economy, recent challenges including a decline in profits by nearly R100 billion over the past year, lower commodity prices, and losses experienced by large mining companies, indicate the urgent need for reform. Woodley said that although initiatives such as the R400 million fund announced by Mineral Resources and Energy Minister, Gwede Mantashe, to support new mining exploration are positive steps, they are not sufficient to address the underlying issues. South Africa's ranking among the least attractive jurisdictions in the world according to the Fraser Institute's Investment Attractiveness Index highlights the necessity for immediate attention to the country's regulatory framework to restore investor confidence in the mining sector. Woodley also points out that South African domestic equities have limited exposure to battery metals crucial for the global drive towards decarbonization, leaving investors primarily reliant on established mining giants such as Anglo American, BHP, and Glencore. This overreliance may pose challenges for sectoral expansion and hinder the growth of smaller players. He concluded by emphasising the need for swift fundamental sectoral transformation through productive discussions between the government and the sector to enhance the attractiveness of South Africa's mining sector.

[Source: Mining Weekly dated 15 February 2024](#)

INTERNATIONAL

NATIONS UNITE AT UN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSEMBLY - The sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) recently took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 26 February to 1 March 2024, with over 7,000 delegates from 182 countries participating in discussions aimed at addressing pressing global environmental challenges. The primary issues discussed include the matters of escalating climate change, the threat of mass extinction for millions of species, and global pollution. In her opening remarks, Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), highlighted the impacts of environmental degradation, from heatwaves and storms to dwindling biodiversity and polluted air and oceans. She emphasised that while these effects disproportionately affect the world's poor and vulnerable populations, no corner of the world remains immune to its reach. Established in 2012 following the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), UNEA serves as the global forum for environmental decision-making, with a membership that encompasses all 193 UN Member States. Meeting biennially, the Assembly sets the agenda for international environmental policies and shapes the course of action for UNEP, headquartered in Nairobi. Discussions will also cover the environmental implications of mineral and metal extraction. Over the course of UNEA-6, delegates will deliberate on approximately 19 resolutions, each aimed at catalysing more ambitious multilateral environmental action. These resolutions encompass a wide spectrum of issues, including proposals for solar radiation modification, strategies for achieving climate justice through inclusive and sustainable initiatives, and protocols for the comprehensive management of chemicals, waste, and sand and dust storms. In

advocating for robust resolutions with tangible impacts, Andersen emphasised the vital role of UNEA in laying the groundwork for a sustainable future and the potential benefits of these measures, ranging from accelerating the transition to net-zero emissions and enhancing air and water quality to bolstering resilience against drought and other environmental hazards.

[Source: United Nations News dated 26 February 2024](#)

OVER 100 NEW SPECIES DISCOVERED IN UNDERWATER MOUNTAIN RANGE – A groundbreaking expedition led by researchers from the Schmidt Ocean Institute has revealed a host of previously undiscovered biodiversity hidden deep beneath the ocean's surface, off the coast of Chile. At depths of around 3000 meters, the team encountered an array of life forms thriving in the rugged terrain of underwater mountains known as seamounts. These seamounts, characterized by steep cliffs rising from the ocean floor, had largely remained unexplored until recently. In total, the expedition unearthed over 100 previously unknown species, ranging from sponges and amphipods to urchins, crustaceans, and corals. The team's findings shed light on the remarkable diversity thriving in these unexplored regions of the ocean. In addition to discovering new species, the researchers also mapped four previously unidentified seamounts in Chilean waters, including one towering peak measuring an impressive 3530 meters from sea floor to summit. Crucially, many of these seamounts are located within protected marine parks, such as the Juan Fernández and Nazca-Desventuradas marine parks administered by Chile. These protected areas serve as havens for marine life, nurturing biodiversity hotspots that contribute to the ecological richness of the region. Beyond their immediate discoveries, the researchers aim to research the genetic makeup and ecological roles of the newfound species. By studying these organisms, scientists hope to unravel the lineages and evolutionary pathways that have shaped the marine ecosystems of the region over time.

[Source: Science dated 22 February 2024](#)

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For more information contact admin@imbewu.co.za or visit <https://imbewu.co.za/she-electronic-legal-registers/>

SA National Water Week – 20 to 26 March 2024:

Engineering News – [Ensuring South Africa's water security: The imperative of reliable water infrastructure](#)

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