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## SUSTAINABILITY NEWSLETTER

### MAY 2024

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## NATIONAL

**SA ELECTIONS 2024: PARTY MANIFESTOS ON ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE** – With a population of more than 62 million people and considered the most industrialised economy in Africa, SA was listed as the world's 14th largest emitter of greenhouse gases in 2018. The ongoing electricity crisis coupled with a failure to meet wider renewable energy goals means that coal plants will continue to run for longer, in turn jeopardizing SA's ability to reach the 2030 climate pledge and the goal of net-zero emissions by 2050. Various commitments have been made by SA's prominent political parties including the ANC, DA and EFF, in their latest election manifestos covering a range of issues connected to climate change. Despite many people already experiencing the impact of climate change, including droughts, floods and an acute water crisis, climate change itself is not a key focus for SA voters. As of 2021, only about half of South Africans said they had heard of climate change. In its manifesto for the 2024 election, the ANC reiterates its commitment to net-zero, adaptation and mitigation plans, plus pledges to continue to "work with other countries in the fight against climate change, global poverty and inequality in line with applicable international resolutions". The DA manifesto also says it is committed to "achieving net-zero carbon emissions to reduce the impact of energy generation on the climate". Within its manifesto, the EFF also pitches climate action, although it does not explicitly back the net-zero target. It says "the EFF government will reduce carbon emissions by 10% by 2029 and will renegotiate our nationally determined contribution, which includes components on climate adaptation and mitigation as well as support requirements for both." During COP26 in Glasgow, SA, alongside France, Germany, the UK, US and the European Union, announced a Just Energy Transition Partnership. This is designed to mobilise an initial \$8.5bn to support SA "to move away from coal and to accelerate its transition to a low emission, climate resilient economy". However, SA's worsening electricity crisis has raised concerns that it may struggle to fulfil its climate ambitions. In their 2024 election manifestos, the ANC and the DA do not mention coal, instead pledging investments in renewable energy. However, the EFF says that it would "establish a state-owned mining company to manage coal mines owned by Eskom, ensuring a quality coal supply at affordable prices". Meanwhile, despite the continued support for coal in South Africa, the ANC, DA and EFF all acknowledge the

importance of renewable energy in their manifestos. Alongside the power crisis, SA is also suffering a water crisis, as droughts become increasingly common. In March 2024, thousands lined up for water in Johannesburg while sewage systems are leaking and polluting the country's freshwater supply, further complicating the matter. Political parties have also focused on water security in their manifestos, proposing specific solutions to improve water and sanitation services. For example, the ANC promises it will allocate more powers to the national and provincial government to provide clean water to citizens. The EFF has a similar solution – prioritising government intervention. The DA, on the other hand, wants to involve “private companies in water infrastructure projects through a performance-based private-public partnership model”.

[Source: Carbon Brief dated 22 May 2024](#)

**SA PIONEERING CONVERSION OF WASTE INTO BIOETHANOL** – A first-for-SA solution has been developed to convert cellulose fibre-rich waste from pulp and paper mill operations into ethanol using a specialised fermentation process. Ethanol is a versatile starting material that finds diverse application in the production of industrial chemicals, bio-based plastics and sustainable aviation fuel. The solution was recently announced by the Paper Manufacturers Association of South Africa (PAMSA), in collaboration with Stellenbosch University, Sappi Southern Africa and Mpact. A demonstration plant, co-funded by the Department of Science and Innovation and PAMSA, was shown to government officials, media and industry partners at Sappi Tugela mill in Mandini, KwaZulu-Natal. Paper sludge is a solid waste with a high moisture content. It comes from the production of paper using virgin wood fibre and/or recycled paper and collected from the paper mill wastewater treatment systems. Bioethanol comes with many environmental credentials and further contributes to the circularity of the pulp and paper sector,” explains Jane Molony, PAMSA executive director. Driven by the vast potential of this feedstock, the research at Stellenbosch University have shown that paper sludge, as well as food and textile waste, does not require pre-treatment before hydrolysis-fermentation. This solution will help to reduce the amount of waste disposed to landfill and the associated greenhouse gas emissions and improve water reclamation for re-use, further contributing to the circular economic and industrial decarbonisation. The solution holds substantial economic promise as waste-derived bioethanol commands premium prices in global markets, and furthermore the project has the potential to generate sustainable employment and upskilling opportunities and stimulate regional economic development. The current demonstration plant has been deployed for a nine-month period at Sappi's Tugela mill in northern KZN with a follow-up project planned at Mpact's mill in Springs, Gauteng.

[Source: Sustainability Handbook dated 9 May 2024](#)

## INTERNATIONAL

**ISRAEL/PALESTINE CONFLICT BRINGS DESTRUCTION TO GAZA'S ENVIRONMENT** - "In northern Gaza, two-thirds of the land was agricultural - now there's nothing left," says Samar Safiya, a Gazan environmental activist. "More than 80,000 tons of Israeli bombs have spared neither fields, olive trees nor lemon trees. As the Israeli offensive in Gaza enters its eighth month, more than 34,000 Gazans have been killed and 77,000 wounded. With more than half of the population on the brink of starvation, the destruction of Gaza's environment and food production capabilities is both an immediate concern and one with catastrophic long-term consequences. Combined with the destruction of natural areas, waste treatment infrastructure, and debris removal, this amounts to over \$1.5 billion which excludes environmental restoration and reconstruction costs. According to a British-American study, the greenhouse gas emissions generated during the first two months of the war in Gaza were greater than the annual carbon footprint of more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations. It estimates that the climate cost of the first 60 days of Israel's war is equivalent to burning at least 150,000 tons of coal. The UN further stated that Israeli bombardments have created 37 million tons of debris. "That's more than the whole of Ukraine in two years," points out Wim Zwijnenburg, a researcher on the effects of conflict on the environment at PAX, a Dutch organisation that has documented, and denounced, how Israel's war is making Gaza uninhabitable. Contamination by asbestos and heavy metals, dust and fine particles, toxic waste from hospitals and industries, and diseases spread by decomposing bodies add to the growing list of environmental and human health concerns. Around 70,000 tons of solid waste is said to have accumulated in the makeshift dumps that have sprung up all over the Gaza Strip, contaminating soil and waterways. At the same time, more than 130,000 cubic meters of water is discharged into the Mediterranean Sea every day, causing serious damage to underwater flora and fauna, warns the UN. Some organisations are accusing Israel of committing ecocide. "The destruction of land is a systematic genocidal practice in the same way as the

destruction of food production, schools, and hospitals, which is well documented in situ," says Lucia Rebolino of Forensic Architecture. "From a legal point of view, ecocide has no clear definition. The Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute list war crimes against the environment and civilians, but you have to meet their criteria", he explains to The New Arab. The Israeli army itself has tried to justify its destruction of agricultural land. " Hamas often operates from orchards, fields and farmland," explained a spokesman quoted by The Guardian. "The army does not intentionally harm agricultural land and strives to avoid any impact on the environment in the absence of operational necessity." The UN has opened an inquiry into the destruction of the environment, but these steps will have to wait until the end of the war before any conclusions can be reached.

[Source: The New Arab dated 9 May 2024](#)

**LANDMARK COURT RULING GRANTS PERUVIAN RIVER LEGAL RIGHTS** – The Nauta provincial court ruling says the Marañón River has legal rights to exist, flow and be free from pollution. The ruling is the first time Peru has recognized that ecosystems possess legal rights and is based on a constellation of legal precedents in international and Peruvian law. The court also ruled that Indigenous organizations and various government agencies are "guardians, defenders and representatives of the Marañón River and its tributaries," meaning those entities have the authority to speak on behalf of the waterways in governmental decision making and in court. Attorney Martiza Quispe Mamani, who represented the Indigenous Kukama plaintiffs in the lawsuit, hailed the ruling as "historic" and a "transcendental milestone for the protection not only of the Marañón River but also of all rivers contaminated by extractive activities." For decades, the Marañón River, which runs near one of Peru's highest oil producing zones, has been affected by dozens of oil spills. Kukama Indigenous communities and others in the Loreto area rely on the Marañón River ecosystem as a source of sustenance, drinking water and for the irrigation of crops. The health of the waterways has also been affected by hydroelectric dams and other developments, including the "Amazon Waterway," a multimillion dollar dredging project in the Peruvian Amazon, including portions of the Marañón River, that is aimed at making waterways more accessible to boats. The Nauta court's recognition of the Marañón River's rights does not immediately affect oil production or other potentially nature-harming activities but could set the stage for future litigation. As its guardians, Indigenous organizations can now go to court on behalf of the Marañón River to block the authorisation of activities like mining or drilling that could infringe on the river's rights. Those groups could also ask courts to order polluters to carry out restoration and clean-ups of the waterways. As part of the ruling, the Nauta court also ordered Petroperú, the State oil company and one of the defendants in the case, to update its environmental management plan related to an oil pipeline notorious for leaks and spills and ordered the Peruvian government to set up a "specialized water resource basin" for the benefit of the Marañón River and its tributaries.

[Source: The cooldown dated 27 May 2024](#)

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

**SA National Environment Month: 1 – 30 June 2024:**

<https://www.gov.za/NationalEnvironmentMonth2024#:~:text=National%20Environment%20Month%20is%20celebrated,to%20become%20agents%20for%20change>.

**World Environment Day: 5 June 2024**

<https://www.worldenvironmentday.global/about/history>

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