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SUSTAINABILITY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2026

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<https://imbewu.co.za/publications/>

NATIONAL

FAILING WATER SYSTEMS WILL COST R400 BILLION TO REPAIR - South Africa faces a massive water infrastructure crisis, with the national maintenance backlog for water and sanitation systems expected to cost about R400 billion to repair. This figure was confirmed by the Minister responsible for water and sanitation, Pemmy Majodina, during a parliamentary response in December. Despite the scale of the problem, only R26 billion has been budgeted for the 2025/26 financial year, covering both departmental spending and grants to municipalities.

According to recent Green and Blue Drop assessments, 73% of the country's 144 water service authorities have systems rated as poor or critical. Ageing infrastructure, rampant leaks, burst pipes, billing failures and the provision of free basic water all contribute to what is known as non-revenue water, further draining municipal budgets and undermining service delivery.

The Minister stressed that the sharp decline in water and sanitation services stems largely from municipalities failing to prioritise essential maintenance. With 104 municipalities already falling into critical categories, experts warn that without urgent intervention, the country risks deeper service failures impacting millions of households.

Source: <https://groundup.org.za/article/failing-water-systems-will-cost-r400-billion-to-fix-says-minister/>

FLOODING IN KRUGER NATIONAL PARK CAUSES OVER R500M IN DAMAGE - Severe flooding at the Kruger National Park has resulted in damage estimated at more than R500 million, with costs expected to increase as floodwaters continue to recede and full assessments become possible. The flooding follows weeks of sustained heavy rainfall across parts of Mpumalanga and Limpopo, which forced the evacuation of nearly 600 people from the reserve.

SANParks confirmed that around 500 staff members were stranded in the Mopane and Olifants regions of the park. Food parcels are being delivered to affected staff, and SANParks has reported that morale remains stable despite challenging conditions. Eighteen camps across the park remain closed.

The floods have caused extensive damage to roads, bridges and tourist facilities, significantly disrupting park operations. One of the most serious impacts is the partial collapse of the Letaba Bridge, which has effectively severed access between the northern and southern sections of the park. As a result, only three entrance gates, Paul Kruger, Numbi and Malelane, are currently open to visitors.

Visitor numbers between 9 and 19 January dropped to just over 24 000, representing a 41% decline compared to the same period last year. This reduction raises concerns about medium- to long-term revenue losses. A Kruger Recovery Fund has been established to support reconstruction efforts. Flood damage has also disrupted flights to Hoedspruit after the airport runway was affected, compounding the broader impact on tourism and regional infrastructure.

Source: <https://www.ewn.co.za/kruger-national-park-flood-damage-estimated-at-r500m-as-recovery-fund-launched/>

JOHANNESBURG ADVANCES PLAN TO RE-ACQUIRE KELVIN POWER STATION - The City of Johannesburg is taking significant steps toward re-acquiring the Kelvin power station, South Africa's only privately owned coal-fired power plant, in a bid to cut its dependence on Eskom and provide more affordable electricity to residents. City Power has formally submitted feasibility proposals to the city council, requesting approval to conduct detailed financial and technical studies on bringing the facility back under municipal ownership.

According to documents presented to the council, Johannesburg's heavy reliance on Eskom has left the metro vulnerable to persistent generation shortfalls, frequent load shedding and rising electricity tariffs. Preliminary assessments suggest that electricity supplied by Kelvin has historically been cheaper than bulk power purchased from Eskom, offering the potential for reduced procurement costs and improved financial sustainability. Although Kelvin currently contributes only around 10% of the city's baseload demand, the feasibility study indicates that municipal control could support tariff relief and strengthen long-term energy security. The Competition Commission approved the acquisition of Kelvin's holding company in May 2024, paving the way for ownership restructuring aligned with Johannesburg's energy diversification strategy.

If approved, the re-acquisition could form a key pillar of the city's broader plan to stabilise electricity supply, reduce exposure to national grid constraints and transition toward a more resilient, locally anchored energy model.

Source: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-12-23-city-power-wants-to-buy-kelvin-power-station-and-egoli-gas/>

INTERNATIONAL

Historic High Seas Treaty Enters into Force on 17 January 2026 - A landmark international treaty aimed at protecting marine biodiversity in the world's high seas officially entered into force on 17 January 2026, marking the first binding global framework for the conservation and sustainable use of marine life beyond national jurisdiction. Formally known as the Agreement on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), the treaty was adopted by the United Nations in June 2023 after nearly two decades of negotiations. It requires ratification by at least 60 countries to become legally binding; this threshold was reached on 19 September 2025, triggering a 120-day countdown to entry into force.

The treaty fills a long-standing governance gap for the high seas, the vast areas of ocean that lie outside the exclusive economic zones of coastal states and have historically lacked comprehensive regulation. These waters cover a significant portion of the planet and host diverse ecosystems that are vital to global climate regulation, food security and biodiversity.

Key provisions include mechanisms to establish marine protected areas, requirements for environmental impact assessments before potentially harmful activities take place, rules on the equitable sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources and support for capacity-building and technology transfer for participating countries.

The entry into force of the High Seas Treaty represents a significant milestone in multilateral cooperation and ocean governance, setting the stage for the first Conference of the Parties and the initial implementation of its conservation measures.

Source: <https://earthshotprize.org/news/the-high-seas-treaty-comes-into-force-what-this-means-for-ocean-protection/>

World's Oceans Heat Up at Record Rate – The world's oceans absorbed a record amount of heat in 2025, intensifying risks of sea level rise, stronger storms and widespread coral loss, according to an international team of scientists. Research published in *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences* found that the oceans accumulated approximately 23 zettajoules of heat last year, equivalent to nearly four decades of global primary energy consumption. This represents the highest annual increase since modern ocean temperature records began in the early 1950s.

The study involved more than 50 scientists from 31 research institutions, using multiple data sources, including a fleet of thousands of floating robotic instruments capable of monitoring ocean conditions down to 2 000 meters. Analysing the deep ocean rather than surface fluctuations provides a more accurate measure of the sustained impact of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions.

Oceans absorb about 90% of the excess heat generated by greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide from fossil fuel use, making them a key regulator of Earth's climate. The rate of ocean warming is accelerating due to the continued increase in greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere. The findings highlight the growing pressures on the planet's climate system. Continued warming of the oceans is expected to contribute to more frequent extreme weather events, accelerated ice melt and severe impacts on marine ecosystems.

Source: <https://www.news24.com/business/climate-future/news/violent-storms-ahead-as-oceans-soak-up-record-heat-levels-20260109-0505>

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



2 February 2026- World Wetlands Day <https://www.worldwetlandsday.org/>

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