

# WALVIS BAY'S WETLANDS CONSERVATION PROJECT : A PROGRESS REPORT

In the January 1986 issue of Inkundla a full report was published on the Walvis Bay Wetlands Project, outlining our concern for the future of this important lagoon as well as some of the steps Round Table in SWA/Namibia are taking to ensure its future survival.

During the past year there have been a number of developments concerning coastal conservation in this country, the most important one being a workshop held in Swakopmund on the formulation of a masterplan for the coastal and adjacent desert regions. This workshop was organised by the SWA/Namibia Directorate of Nature Conservation, but was open to the public and sought the active participation of people from all sectors of the community. From this workshop it became abundantly clear that the Walvis Bay lagoon and surrounding area is the spot on the SWA/Namibia coast which is most urgently in need of conservation rating and sound future planning. This is based on the following findings:

- (a) the lagoon system is highly sensitive and is silting up, mainly as a result of the encroachment of urban development.
- (b) the area has a high tourist potential, involving;
  - fishing,
  - water sports,
  - bird watching,
  - scenery.
- (c) the lagoon is the most important wetlands on the SWA/Namibia coast providing feeding grounds for over 100 000 birds belonging to over 40 species. The area contains important populations of locally breeding species (in terms of percentages of the total populations) as well as large populations of Palearctic migrants which breed annually in places such as Siberia and Greenland.
- (d) the lagoon serves as a nutrient-rich nursery ground for many fish species, amongst which are the more popular angling fishes such as kob, steenbras, most gamefish, etc.
- (e) areas immediately adjacent to the lagoon contain irreplaceable archeological sites such as shell middens
- (f) the lagoon serves as a sand trap as well as a barrier to the dunes which move in a northely direction
- (g) the wetland system has a high educational potential, for both formal- and informal teaching.
- (h) finally, because of the pressure on the area from urban and industrial development as well as the rich abundance of birds, fish and other organisms, the area has a high research priority rating.

In view of these findings the following resolution was formulated by delegates at the workshop, and unanimously accepted.

"The Walvis Bay enclave, which includes several sensitive features such as the Kuisseb delta, has been identified as a Key area for:

- the protection of;
  - wetland birds
  - unique lichen/flora
  - valuable archaeological sites
- recreation and tourism,
- the exploitation and development of the Central Namib area.

**In order to develop an effective overall coastal management plan for the Namib coastal zone it is essential that the cooperation and support of responsible South African Environmental authorities be sought, and that as a matter of urgency they commit themselves to a co-ordinated management strategy for the whole region."**

Much of the information which allowed delegates to identify Walvis Bay as a priority area had been gathered as part of Round Table's monitoring and research programme to investigate the stability, the ecological importance and the future potential of the lagoon system.

During the course of the year Walvis Bay R.T. 36 arranged and supported a summer and a winter bird count of the lagoon. The summer count resulted in a total of 103 000 wetland birds (excluding comorants and gannets), of which 65 000 were Palearctic migrants (e.g. curlew sandpipers 17 900, sanderlings 10 300, little stint 3 700 etc.). In addition, almost 30 000 flamingos were recorded in the lagoon.

Two other aspects of the lagoon project that have received attention are, a hydrological study of the area, mainly concentrating on the rate of siltation and, public education. Preliminary appraisal and advice has been obtained from members of the Hydrological Department at the University of Cape Town. Local involvement will be encouraged, and it is hoped that the schools will become involved in monitoring water-flow into and out of the system once the necessary equipment is set up. Finally, Bob Mould (architect, Hochland 154) has designed an outdoor exhibition/education stand to be constructed at the edge of the lagoon. Negotiations are in progress with the Walvis Bay Municipality. We hope that by the time YOU visit Walvis Bay the survival of the lagoon, with its breath-taking array of birdlife, its important fisheries resource and its many other attributes, will be safe and protected for future generations to responsibly utilize and enjoy.

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