

Sensitive Coastal Areas 2D

Our coast's beauty and diversity, with its estuaries, wetlands, dunes, beaches and rocky shores, make it an attractive place to visit and live at. Unfortunately, this results in ever-increasing development pressure, which may compromise the very features that make the coast special. Many of its ecosystems are extremely sensitive to disturbance, and certain activities, such as indiscriminate clearing of plots and levelling of dunes for development sites, can cause irreparable damage.

Criteria for Sensitive Coastal Areas (SCAs)

Sensitive Coastal Areas are identified by using one or more of the following criteria:

- Physical sensitivity, which includes unstable dunes, steep slopes and cliffs.
- Vegetation, such as communities with a limited distribution, a diversity of species and/or threatened or endemic species.
- Archaeological sites, including shell middens, rock shelters and other places inhabited by pre-colonial people.

- Other information, for example rare and/or endangered animals, visual importance, cultural resources and socio-economic aspects.

Using these criteria, a number of environments are usually included in Sensitive Coastal Areas. These are water bodies, watercourses and their banks and geotechnically unstable or unsuitable areas. Beaches, dunes and rocky shores and important vegetation communities also qualify. The legal boundaries of Sensitive Coastal Areas have to be unambiguously defined, by using features that can be clearly seen, such as roads, rivers, railway lines and cadastral boundaries.

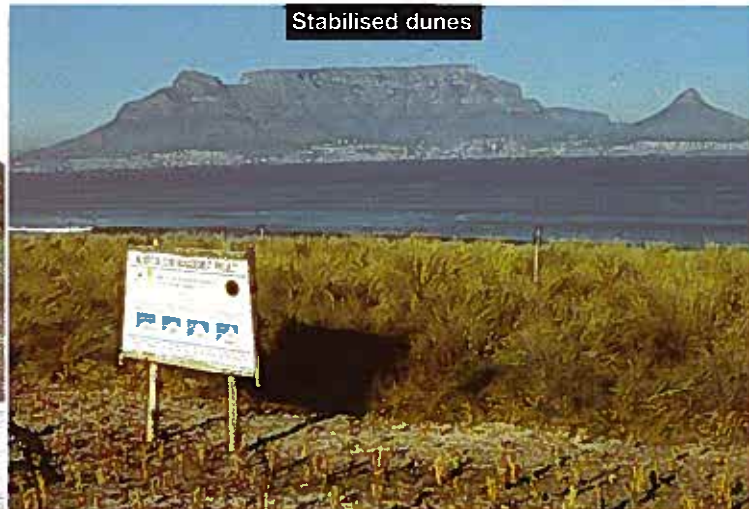
Legislation

In 1996 and 1998 the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism instituted regulations in terms of the updated Environmental Conservation Act (Act 73 of 1989). The regulations were introduced to protect sensitive areas of our coast, particularly from indiscriminate plot-clearing and dune-flattening to prepare sites for development. In terms of the regulations, earthworks, dredging, dune stabilization and disturbance of vegetation are prohibited within demarcated Sensitive Coastal Areas unless a permit has been obtained. The application for a permit must be accompanied by an environmental impact report. The issue of the permit is subject to the degree of environmental impact of the proposed activity.

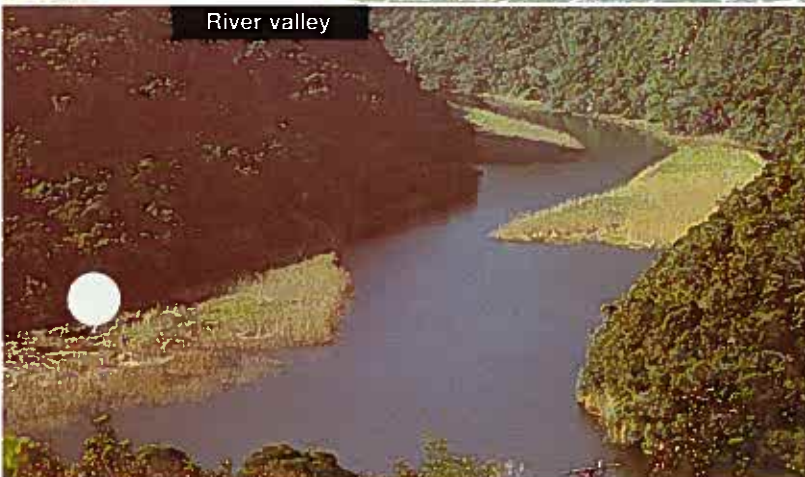
Unstable slope



Stabilised dunes



River valley



Earthworks



The regulations avoid duplicating existing legislation, so they do not apply to mining, commercial forestry, agriculture or activities controlled by the Environmental Impact Assessment regulations of 1997. Domestic gardening activities are also exempted from the regulations, providing these activities are not expanded beyond their present limits. The Sensitive Coastal Areas regulations will generally not be applied within urbanised areas.

Implementation

Administration of the SCA regulations is usually delegated to local authorities. However, a local authority or provincial department wishing to undertake any of the controlled activities has to submit a permit application to the relevant provincial Premier, while a national department has to apply to the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism for a permit. The Record of Decision must be kept by the authority concerned, and also submitted to the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEA&T). The Record of Decision must also be made available to any party upon request, since the success of the regulations will largely depend on the ability of the public to monitor their implementation.

In order to assist authorities and applicants in implementing the SCA regulations, DEA&T has published *Guidelines for the Control and Management of Activities in Sensitive Coastal Areas*, and developed a computer-based Decision Support System (DSS).

Published guidelines

The guidelines comprise four Volumes:

Volume 1 The Control of Activities in Sensitive Coastal Areas – an introduction, overview and general background summary.

Volume 2 Guidelines and definitions – a review of the principles involved in determining the impacts of activities, and definitions of scientific and technical terms used.

Volume 3 Legal aspects, requirements and procedures – an explanation of the legal procedures relevant to the implementation of the SCA regulations.

Volume 4 Pro forma Environmental Impact Questionnaire/Report – a questionnaire form to determine

the potential environmental impact, as well as forms for the permit application and the record of decision. Where available, the Decision Support System can also be used to help complete the impact report.

Decision Support System

The Decision Support System is a management tool to assist authorities, planners and developers to assess environmental issues and make informed decisions with regards to the application and issuing of permits under the regulations for Sensitive Coastal Areas.

The Decision Support System is a computerised database and questionnaire containing relevant information on subjects such as vegetation, physical sensitivity, land-use plans and endangered or rare species. It conveys information effectively, is fast and easy to use and requires only basic computer knowledge and access. In addition it is easy to maintain, update and modify and can be run on any basic computer system. It provides an interface between researchers who provide the data and decision-makers who need and use the data.

Test Cases on the Garden Route and KwaZulu-Natal

The regulations were first promulgated on 31 May 1996 for an initial test case – the Outeniqua SCA from Tergriet to the Kaaimans River on the Garden Route coast. On 27 November 1998, further regulations were promulgated for an extension of the Outeniqua SCA to the Bloukrans River (120 km eastward), as well as at Pennington and Umtamvuna on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast. Urban areas have generally been excluded from the Outeniqua SCA and its Extension, where the regulations focus on rural areas. However, in the Pennington and Umtamvuna SCAs the main emphasis is on protecting "green wedges" within a generally urbanised region.

Numerous other areas on the South African coastline warrant legal protection, and the intention is to implement the SCA regulations in these areas in a phased manner, hopefully at the request of local authorities or interest groups.

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FURTHER INFORMATION:

- *Guidelines for the Control and management of Activities in Sensitive Coastal Areas*. 2000. Marine & Coastal Management, Private Bag X2, Roggebaai 8012, Tel. (021) 402-3911.

RELATED FACTSHEETS:

- Sandy Beaches • Impacts of Human Activity on the Coast • Estuary Management

