



NWDC Building, Cnr. University
& provident Street, Mmabatho
Private Bag X15
MMABATHO, 2735

COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Enquiries: Khumo More
Tel: 018 388 1335
Email: kmore@nwp.gov.za

MEDIA STATEMENT

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DEDECT and PHASA strengthen partnership to advance wildlife economy and SEZ designation.

The North West Department of Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism (DEDECT), led by the MEC Bitsa Lenkopane held a strategic engagement with the Professional Hunters' Association of South Africa (PHASA) on 20 January 2026, aimed at strengthening collaboration in support of the Province's Special Economic Zone (SEZ) designation process. This forms part of the series of stakeholder engagements toward the designation of the province's proposed SEZ.

These consultations are being conducted with sectors identified as central to the economic vision of the province, ensuring that every industry with a strategic role is included in shaping the final application and implementation framework of the SEZ. Part of the departmental delegation included Head of Department Mr. Relebohile Mofokane, Acting CEOs of North West Parks and Tourism Board and NWDC Jonathan Denga and Thapelo Mokotedi, as well as PHASA CEO, President, and Chairperson, Jess de Klerk, Eardley Rudman, and Ilse de Klerk.

The engagement focused on positioning the wildlife and biodiversity economy as a key industrial pillar within the proposed SEZ, with emphasis on localisation, beneficiation, job creation, skills development, and meaningful community participation.

The meeting confirmed that the SEZ programme presents an opportunity to ensure that products derived from the Province's wildlife economy are processed, beneficiated and manufactured within the North West, rather than exported for processing elsewhere. Opportunities were identified across the full wildlife value chain, including skins and hides processing and tanning, bone-related product streams, and other wildlife-derived manufacturing activities, supported by enabling systems such as compliance, traceability, logistics, and market access.

PHASA reaffirmed its commitment to partner with the Provincial Government by providing technical expertise, research, and evidence-based inputs to strengthen the SEZ designation application. The association further highlighted the importance of science-based decision-making and confirmed collaboration with institutions such as SANBI and Stellenbosch University to support credible research and data-driven planning.

MEC Lenkopane placed strong emphasis on transformation and community development, asserting that the SEZ must deliver tangible socioeconomic benefits for the people of the

province. She reiterated that the wildlife sector must support inclusive development by creating jobs, expanding opportunities for small businesses, and ensuring that rural communities are not excluded from economic growth. The collaboration with PHASA represents a commitment to local enterprise development, skills development, compliance support, and targeted interventions that will assist local businesses and previously disadvantaged individuals to participate meaningfully in the biodiversity and wildlife economy.

A Biodiversity Economy and Manufacturing Workstream will be established to drive coordination, project identification, and implementation, operating under clear governance and reporting arrangements. The MEC welcomed PHASA's commitment and reiterated that partnerships with organised industry are critical to unlocking investment, industrial growth, and community beneficiation in the Province.

"This engagement marks an important step in ensuring that the wildlife economy contributes meaningfully to industrialisation, job creation, and community upliftment in the North West. The SEZ provides a platform to turn our natural assets into inclusive economic opportunities," said the MEC.

Progress on the agreed action plan will be monitored and reported to the MEC as the SEZ designation process advances.

The MEC will lead her department to also engage with mining and tourism industry role players, as well as other government departments and municipalities.

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For inquiries, contact:

Thomas Matlapeng - 083 687 3649

OR

Mr. Jeremiah Matebesi

Director: Communication and IT Services

072 333 0325

Email: JeremiahMatebesi@nwp.gov.za

Twitter: @nwp_dedect / Facebook: @nwdedect