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Department:  
Environment & Nature Conservation  
NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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# DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE CONSERVATION

**COMMUNICATIONS POLICY  
05 MARCH 2014  
ADMINISTRATION SUPPORT SERVICES  
VERSION 01**

*"A PROSPEROUS AND EQUITABLE SOCIETY LIVING IN HARMONY WITH OUR NATURAL RESOURCES"*

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## 1. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This Communications Policy is informed by decisions of the state of the nation Address of February 2007. Its aims are to guide all communication efforts and to improve the department's communications internally and externally. It is also prescribed in the Public Service Regulations that the department should have a Communications Policy to guide employees within the department on how communications with printed or other public media will be conducted.

Media plays an important role in the democratic process – providing the public with news and information about government, and reporting on the public's views and opinions of government. The department must cultivate proactive relations with the media to promote public awareness, and understanding of government policies, programs, services and initiatives.

Therefore, the department must operate and respond effectively in a 24-hour media environment. Thus, they should be able to reach and inform the media on short notice on issues of importance to decision-makers and the public. The department must engage the media using a variety of communication tools, including news conferences, background or technical briefings, news releases, and audio-video presentations.

It is paramount that the department facilitates information or interview requests from the media, and manages plans and strategies for communicating with the media. The department must consult the MEC's office when planning media campaigns or strategies that could involve ministerial participation, or when preparing a response to a media enquiry that could have implications for the MEC.

The department must ensure that quality and consistent information services are provided to the media. Media enquiries, whether by phone, email, letter or in person, must be addressed promptly to accommodate publication deadlines.

The Communication specialist responsible for media relations must ensure that media requests, particularly for interviews or technical information on specialized subjects, are directed to knowledgeable managers or staff designated to speak as official representatives of the department. This policy will attempt to elevate the status of the communications function with the COMTASK recommendations by ensuring that:

- The Batho Pele principles which advocate transparency, accountability and openness are adhered to.
- The communications policy is consistent with the, mission, vision, policies and transformation objectives of the department, and with the national and provincial communication policies and strategies.
- There is closer liaison with other departments to ensure co-ordination, coherence and consistency in government messages and communication strategies.

- Effective communications promote and defend the services, programmes and policies of the department.
- The Communication Unit enjoys the confidence and trust of senior officials to ensure effective management and flow of information. This includes regular access to top management to discuss communication strategies and methods.
- The fundamental building blocks are: quality information, effective management of campaigns, researching problematic areas, commitment towards the policies of the department, monitoring and evaluating, ensuring high levels of professionalism and service excellence.
- Communications always strive towards proactive and developmental communication and not only to react to inquiries and reports.
- Communicators are fully informed of all proposals, policy decisions and matters affecting the department to ensure that an effective communication strategy is designed.
- The communication Unit personnel are not only regarded as machinery for announcing decisions and issuing press releases. They should form part of the formulation of policy. They should also be consulted concerning timing, method and contents of messages.
- Access to information by the public is ensured at all times, while at the same time respecting confidentiality of information.
- The Communication unit keeps abreast with developments in the communication and information field so as to ensure effective communication methods.
- Good relationships are built and maintained with all stakeholders. The department's credibility depends on providing stakeholders with accurate, timely, appropriate and clear information.
- There is a constant flow of information from all sections in the department to the communication unit to ensure that all relevant information is made known to those who should be informed.
- Communicators do not use their positions or government resources to promote or prejudice the interest of any political party.
- Access to information is critical for historically disadvantaged communities, especially women, children and the disabled, in the exercise of their rights or to access government services.
- Communication is not a barrier between the truth and the public. Visible service delivery is the most effective form of communication.

## Acronyms and Definitions

<b>COMMTASK</b>	: The Communications Task group report published in 1996, made 83 recommendations to government to overhaul its communication strategies and methods.
<b>CU</b>	: Communications Unit
<b>DDG</b>	: Deputy Director- General
<b>DTEC</b>	: Department of Tourism Environment and Conservation
<b>HCU</b>	: Head of Communications Unit
<b>HOD</b>	: Head of Department
<b>MEC</b>	: Member of Executive Council

## 1.2 LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

The communication policy of the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation is informed by:

- The recommendations of the COMTASK report called "**Communication 2000** – A vision for government communication in South AFRICA".
- **The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996**. Our democratic Constitution, which promotes transparency and accountability.
- The relevant provisions of the **Public Service Act, No 103 of 1994**
- **Public Service Regulations 2001, 01 January 2001**
- **Batho Pele Principles**
- **Promotion of Access to Information Act , No 2 of 2000**



## 2. POLICY STATEMENT AND APPLICATION SCOPE

### 2.1 POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that communications across the department are well coordinated, effectively managed and responsive to the diverse information needs of the people of the province.

The communication policy provides the framework within which the department will manage, direct, resource and deliver its communication programmes. It also serves as a basis for the development of our communication strategies.

#### **Relationship between Government institutions and the media**

- The relationship between government departments and the media is, in many instances, characterized by mistrust, reluctant cooperation and some element of tension. However, our roles and relationships need not be adversarial. They are, and should be, complementary and mutually beneficial.
- There is a common desire between government and the media to keep the public informed about the activities of government. Media institutions have an interest in securing information on government's activities. On the other hand, government has an interest in using the media to disseminate information that will promote its policies and programmes.
- However, it must be acknowledged that there will always be some healthy tension between the media and government. This tension revolves around the following question – **what information is of public interest and how and when should such information be presented?** For different reasons, the mass media thrives on what is perceived as sensational and controversial information - information which, by and large, government officials would prefer to hide. On the other hand, information that we would enthusiastically present to the media is generally about government achievements and programmes. Unfortunately, this type of information may not be "sensational enough" for the mainstream media.
- The department has to ensure accurate, informed and timely media coverage of all departmental programmes, as one way of keeping the public informed. Our overall strategic objective should be to take maximum advantage of existing opportunities for disseminating information to the public through newspapers, radio stations and televisions. Also critical is to influence the media agenda.
- Our relationship with the media must take into account the fact that the core function of this department is to promote sustainable development and the management of the department. Relationships with the media should promote this end, rather than detract from it.

### 2.1.1 Policy Objectives

- To provide a clear framework for the effective management and coordination of information flow, both internally and externally.
- To encourage managers and employees to communicate openly with the public about policies, programs, services and initiatives they are familiar with and for which they have responsibility.
- To consult the stakeholders, listen to and take account of their interests and concerns when establishing priorities, developing policies, and planning programs and services.
- To ensure that the department is visible, accessible and accountable to the public they serve.
- To identify and address communication needs and issues routinely in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies, programs, services and initiatives of the department.
- To ensure coherence, coordination and uniformity in departmental messages.
- To improve the quality and effectiveness of our relationship with the media by ensuring transparency, accountability and professionalism.
- To develop a common understanding of our various roles and responsibilities in our interaction with the media.
- To ensure co-ordination, consistency and coherence in our media relations.

### 2.1.2 Principles of Communications

Communication Unit must adopt, as one of its central pillars, an approach based on the concept of development communication. This means that communication must become a true dialogue with our people and must not merely inform or raise awareness. This implies a slight shift from a media liaison focus to a community liaison focus. This is the approach, which must, underpin our communication efforts. Thus the following principles of:

#### a) **Accessibility**

- The Spokesperson of the department will, in accordance with the principles of open, transparent and accountable government, be accessible to media representatives and will provide them with accurate and relevant information. We must attempt, in the context of competing work priorities, to take account of the exceptionally tight time schedules within which the media function.



- As a general rule, members of the media and the public must be allowed unhindered access to our hospitals, clinics and other institutions. At all times, care must be taken to protect the privacy and dignity of the people in our care as well as their relatives.

b) **Disclosure**

- The department must commit itself to the principle of disclosure, even where information may not reflect well on the department.
- Information must only be withheld for sound reasons – for instance, sound management practice (e.g. direct internal communication preceding mass media releases), and the relevant explanation supplied to journalists. Disinformation should not be tolerated under any circumstances.
- Adopting the principle of disclosure does not, however, imply that the department forfeits its right to confidentiality. Neither does it mean that every employee in possession of government information, which is of public interest, is bound to pass it on to media.
- In all instances, the HOD in consultation with the MEC as the Executive Authority with formal organizational responsibility for the function in question makes the decision whether to go public with the information.

c) **Reciprocity**

The department will derive maximum benefit from the media if the relationship is a reciprocal one. Just as government has the responsibility to reply to media queries, it must also initiate contacts.

Pro-activeness is critical to maintaining a balanced relationship with media institutions and to influencing the news agenda. This approach is not to be confined to “good news” but will take account of the fact that “bad news” can be presented in a less damaging manner.

d) **Privacy and freedom of speech vs. confidentiality**

The department acknowledges and respects the rights of members of staff to freedom of speech and expression as guaranteed in the Constitution. However, the department also recognizes the need to manage and co-ordinate the flow of official information.

Spokespersons at all times must respect privacy rights, security needs, and matters before the courts, government policy, Cabinet confidences and ministerial responsibility. When speaking as the departments official representative, they must identify themselves by name and position, speak on the record for public attribution, and confine their remarks to matters of fact concerning the policies, programs, services or initiatives of their institution.



Members of the department must reflect the confidentiality of information and must communicate with stakeholders only on issues for which they have been delegated to discharge as their personal responsibilities.

No information will be passed on to external media until it has been vetted by the HOD or the relevant authorised official except the MEC.

### 2.1.3 Co-Ordination and Centralisation

- a) The release of information to the media will be coordinated by a Spokesperson. The Communication Unit will facilitate and coordinate all related functions in the department. It will also serve as a resource channel for the release of factual information to the media by the Spokesperson.

The official spokespersons for the Department are:

- (i) The MEC
- (ii) The DDG (HOD)
- (iii) The relevant DENC experts who have been authorized by the DDG (HOD) to speak on behalf of DENC on specific issues.
- (iv) DENC Spokesperson

- b) The Ministry has the authority to speak to the media on political issues regarding the department. However, the ministry in collaboration with the department has the authority to liaise with the media on operational issues.

Consistent with the COMTASK recommendations, ultimate responsibility for external communication shall lie with the MEC's Office.

The MEC is the principal spokesperson of the department. S/he will be supported in this role by appointed aides, including the HOD, Spokesperson/ Head of Communication and by the senior management team of the department.

The MEC will present and explain government policies, priorities and decisions to the public. The Department will leave political matters to the exclusive domain of the MEC and his/her office.

- c) The HOD as the accounting officer has the authority to speak to the media on the operations of the department.

The department must integrate communications into its corporate management processes and procedures. Communications is a shared responsibility that must be coordinated with other areas of management. The department must:

- (i) develop, implement, manage and evaluate policies, programs, services and initiatives with the ongoing advice, support and involvement of specialists in government communications;



- (ii) ensure that the communications function – as outlined in *the COMTASK document*– has the resources needed to fulfill the requirements of this policy, and that resources are prudently managed;
  - (iii) ensure that staff at all levels carry out their unique role in, and shared responsibilities for, delivering and managing communications;
  - (iv) examine ways to increase efficiency in responding to communication issues, and adjust and simplify approval processes as necessary;
  - (v) ensure the coherence and consistency of information and messages across all channels of communication, from in-person service, telephone and mail, to facsimile, Internet and electronic transmission.
- d) In order to maintain co-ordination and ensure that no contradictory statements emanate from the department, the Ministry or HOD will perennially inform the Communications Unit of the nature and content of their contact with the media (particularly where the subject matter is controversial or of such wide interest that various journalists are likely to approach different sources within the department).

#### 2.1.4 Communications Protocol (Writing)

- a) Only the MEC can write to the Premier, the Mayors, other MEC's and Premiers, National Ministers and Senior Political Office bearers;
- b) Only the HOD has the authority to write to the MEC, DG, DDG's and Municipal Managers;
- c) Any official can write to the DG but it must be done through the DDG (HOD)
- d) When an announcement or a request is made internally the Director of the specific Directorate must sign the memo (with the prescribed letter head, **Annexure A**).

#### 2.1.5 Media statements

- a) The CU at the initiative of the MEC and the HOD could release media statements
- b) The relevant line functionaries will be expected to draft the content of the media statement, which will be edited and released to the relevant media by the CU or Spokesperson;
- c) All relevant statements released to the media shall be copied to Senior Managers, District Managers and Program managers for dissemination and placing on notice boards;
- d) If the media is of sufficient importance to other sectors outside the department, it will be distributed to the main role-players in that particular sector;
- e) All statements by anyone in the department will be forwarded to the MEC's Office twelve (12) hours prior to releasing.

### 2.1.6 Media inquiries

All requests for interviews, information, comment and other inquiries from the media are to be referred to the HCU or Spokesperson. The CU will refer the inquiry to the relevant line function to draft a response or to supply relevant information by a specific date and time. The HOD and the relevant Director must approve such a response or a relevant Programme Manager before being passed on to the CU (using the prescribed form, **Annexure B**). The CU will edit and prepare a draft response and ensure that it is forwarded to the Ministry

As a precautionary measure against possible misquotations and fabrications, media inquiries must be written questions and this will ensure that the CU supplies the media with written responses. This is especially important when dealing with the print media.

### 2.1.7 Internal Communication

Communication among managers and employees must be open and collaborative to achieve the department's vision and missions, and to ensure quality information services for the public.

Internal communication must be a two-way dialogue. Listening to employee ideas, concerns and suggestions for achieving results and improving service, and acting upon them, is just as important as keeping employees informed about the goals and priorities of the department, or about developments, changes or new initiatives affecting their work. Taking account of the views and concerns of employee unions, representatives and associations can also lead to more effective organizational management.

Engaging employees in a conversation for action allows the department to tap into a vast pool of intelligence and expertise. Properly engaged in the life of an organization, employees can be valuable allies in external communications – helping to inform the public, professional colleagues and prospective employees about their organization.

Internal communications is an integral part of the department's corporate communications strategy. Effective internal communication is a shared management responsibility. The HOD must champion the department's commitment to open and collaborative internal communications between management and the communications function. It is essential to ensure internal communication requirements are met.

Managers and supervisors must communicate with employees openly, frequently, and before or at the same time as information is communicated to the public. Training in communications must be available to them to help ensure they are effective communicators.

To foster employee knowledge, awareness and understanding, internal communication will include a mix of published materials (in multiple formats), oral presentations, staff meetings and learning events. Representation on newsletter editorial boards, internal communication advisory committees and evaluation task forces provide additional avenues to engage managers and employees in a conversation for action.



Internal communication activities and processes must be reviewed from time to time to evaluate results, to identify areas for improvement, and to make adjustments as needed. Destructive criticism of other units in the department or provincial and national government on public platforms is discouraged. Criticism should be aired internally and must be constructive and should contribute to the overall effectiveness of the department/government.

### **2.1.8 Targeting and Equity**

The department will treat all media inquiries with equal seriousness and will make its media releases and invitations to media conferences generally available through established communication channels. However, this does not imply deviating from the accepted practice of planning targeted media interventions intended to reach a particular readership /audience through selected media.

Unequal access to information is recognized as a manifestation of the social and economic inequalities that underpin our society and the department will attempt to contribute to more equal access to information by:

- Using both print and electronic media.
- Using both commercial and community media.
- Using a diversity of languages as possible.
- Ensuring that our media liaison activities are not substitutes for direct liaison and interaction with the community. Direct contact with communities (developmental communication), interest groups and leaders of various sectors must constitute one of the central pillars of our communication approach.
- Using a departmental newsletter to be produced twice a year

The department must actively support the development of community media through identifying issues with local appeal, organizing appropriate interviews and considering advertising through such media.

### **2.1.9 Responsibilities of the Communications Unit**

In relation to media liaison, the Communication Unit will play the following role:

- a) Communication staff will act as primary point of contact for journalists seeking information or comment from the department. Communications staff will either refer media queries to the relevant manager for further information. Further the unit will develop a draft response on behalf of the Department to the Ministry, having consulted with and secured information from officials of the appropriate program and expertise.
- b) Coordinate media liaison activities of the Department, particularly with a view to: ensuring coherence and consistency of messages on a single issue; and ensuring diverse coverage to meet the needs of various target groups in relation to a particular campaign or development.

- c) Monitor the print media on a daily basis and facilitate the distribution of daily press clippings to senior management.
- d) Communications Unit staffs will be responsible for ensuring that there is adequate consultation with interested internal stakeholders before releasing a media briefing.
- e) Provide guidance and practical training to senior management, Middle managers and regional managers in their contact with the media. This assistance may take the form of: facilitating formal training in media relations, providing informal advice, drafting of written media statements (and their distribution), organizing media conferences ;arranging interviews or field visits with individual newspapers, radio stations or television channels, lodging complaints and seeking redress in event of blatantly inaccurate or biased reporting.

### **2.1.10 Delegation of responsibilities**

The HOD can designate managers and knowledgeable staff in head office and in the regions to speak in an official capacity on issues or subjects for whom they have responsibility and expertise.

Officials designated to speak on the departments behalf, including technical or subject matter experts, must receive training, particularly in media relations, to carry out their responsibilities effectively and to ensure the requirements of the department and this policy are met.

#### **a) *Line Managers***

Responsibility for effective internal and external communication lies with line managers within the department.


Each programme manager will be expected to report on the positive things they have done in-line with the vision and mission of the department.

Monthly one on one briefing sessions with program managers and their units if a need arises will be conducted towards the positive branding of the department.

#### **b) *District Managers***

Each district manager will act as a District Communication Coordinator and will take the responsibility for communication matters. District managers must confer regularly to ensure the department's communication objectives are met in all regions.

When issuing communications or public information with a regional focus or orientation, or when participating in a local event, the department must ensure that appropriate senior staff from the regional offices concerned is involved in



communications planning, strategy and implementation. Similarly, regionally driven communications activities must involve headquarter operations.

Operational communication procedures and directives, which may be developed at district level, must be consistent with this policy and must be circulated to the Communication Unit and other relevant directorates for ratification.

## **2.2 APPLICATION SCOPE**

This policy will apply to all officials of the Department of Environment and Nature Conservation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SMA', located in the bottom right corner of the page.

### 3. POLICY FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 IDENTIFICATION AND CONSULTATION OF STAKEHOLDERS

This policy went through extensive consultations with senior management and all officials of the department. The consultations were conducted through presentations, meetings and through e-mails.

#### 3.2 TIMEFRAMES

To date there are three drafts of the policy. The first draft was completed on 16 August 2006. The second draft was reviewed by the policy unit from the 12-16 November 2007. The version 1 was completed during the 20 March 2008 and was revised from the 22-26 June 2009. In October 2011 a draft of this policy was reviewed by the departmental legal services and policy unit who submitted their comments on the policy. 20 January 2014, the social media policy was attached to the communications policy as **Annexure C**.

#### 3.3 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

It is the responsibility of each Head of department to ensure that this policy is carefully followed within the department. All managers should make members of their employees aware of the obligation to familiarize themselves with and follow this policy.

##### *Training*

Training in communications must be available to employees to help ensure they are effective communicators. To promote employee knowledge, awareness and understanding, internal communication will include a mix of published materials (in multiple formats), oral presentations, staff meetings and learning events. Representation on newsletter editorial boards, internal communication advisory committees and evaluation task forces provide additional avenues to engage managers and employees in a conversation for action. These measures will empower employees to adopt and familiarize themselves with the communications policy.

An implementation plan will be drafted which will outline how and when this policy will be implemented. The plan will be drafted two months after the implementation date of this policy. In order to ensure adequate implementation of this policy the human resource unit will compile an infrastructure investment (in terms of human capital) and policy management plan. The plan will be updated on an annual basis and will contain details on future guidelines for this policy. The financial implications if any will be indicated on the plan in order to ensure that funds are available or availed.

**The implementation date for this policy is 01 April 2014**

#### 3.4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

This policy will be funded by the Communications unit.

#### 3.5 COMMUNICATION

The communications unit will foster closer liaison with other departments to ensure co-ordination, coherence and consistency in government messages and communication strategies. This will be done through inter-departmental meetings, projects, e-mails, telephonically or formal letters.

The relationship between the department and the media will be mutually beneficial. Therefore, the department will derive maximum benefit from the media if the relationship is a reciprocal one. Just as government has the responsibility to reply to media queries, it must also initiate contact. Pro-activeness is critical to maintaining a balanced relationship with media institutions and to influencing the news agenda.

Hence, the Spokesperson of the department will, in accordance with the principles of open, transparent and accountable government, be accessible to media representatives and provide them with accurate and relevant information. This communication will be provided through various or multiple formats of interaction with professional integrity.

### **3.6 COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)**

The department must ensure that the communication unit has all the necessary resources to carry out their work effectively in line with the recommendation of the COMTASK team. These resources include personnel, appropriate skills and technology. The success of our communications effort is dependent on unqualified support from the highest levels to ensure adequate resourcing of communications. At the same time, communication personnel will be expected to exploit opportunities to develop their own skills and knowledge of communication and information.

#### ***Reporting structure***

The management and direction of the departmental communication line function will be located in the Office of the HOD. The Head of Communication in the Department will be appointed by the HOD and report directly to him/her.

All communication related functions in the department will be reported through the Head of Communication who shall be directly accountable to the HOD. The Head of Communications will consistently inform the Spokesperson on any development both positive and negative.

The Head of Communications will take the lead in determining overall communications policy and in developing a communications strategy.

### **3.7 POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed when the need arises or in case of the occurrence of extenuating circumstances (political mitigation, or pronouncement by legislation and/ or regulations). The contact person for this policy will be required to submit all relevant information pertaining to this policy in conjunction with a signed memo with all amendments (addition or omission) during the third quarter annually.





**The exception**, the Policy development unit will be conducting all extenuating reviews throughout the year, therefore it is paramount that any new information received be submitted to this unit, in order to coordinate the review process of this policy.

**3.8 POLICY IMPACT**

The Communication Unit's desire is to enjoy the confidence and trust of senior officials to ensure effective management and flow of information. This includes regular access to top management to discuss communication strategies and methods. It also includes the elevation of the status of the communication function in accordance with COMTASK recommendations.

Internal communication activities and processes will be reviewed from time to time to evaluate results, to identify areas for improvement, and to make adjustments as needed. An impact study will be conducted two years after the adoption of this policy by the Communications unit, assisted by the policy unit.

**3.9 INTERIM MEASURES**

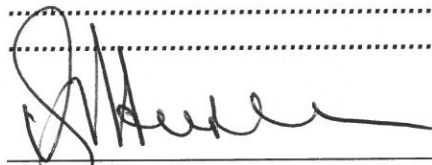
This is an interim document for this Department until such time that a provincial policy has been developed.

**4. ADOPTION OF POLICY**

~~Approved / Not Approved~~

**Comments:**

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**HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

20140305  
**DATE**



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Department:  
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Private Bag X6102, Kimberley, 8300, Metlife Towers, T-Floor, Tel: 053 807 7300, Fax: 053 807 7328

Enquiries:

Ref:

Date:

Mr(s) HOD/ MEC  
Head of Department  
Office of the Premier  
Private Bag X6102  
Kimberley  
8300

Attention: HOD/MEC

**TOPIC: DEPARTMENT OF NATURE CONSERVATION**

Write content of your query, request of information, grievances. Use this paragraph for the body of your letter

Trusting you find this in order.

Regards

---

**NAME OF SUPERVISOR Mr(s)**  
**TITLE: ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE CONSERVATION**  
**NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE**



the denc

Department:  
Environment & Nature Conservation  
NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCE  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X6102, Kimberley, 8300, Metlife Towers, T-Floor, Tel: 053 807 7300, Fax: 053 807 7328

Enquiries:

Ref: H8.1.1.2.64

Date:

Ms HOD MEC  
The Director-General  
Department of Environmental Affairs  
Private Bag X447  
Pretoria  
0001

Attention: Ms H MEC

**INSERT TOPIC HERE**

Receipt of your correspondence regarding the above matter to ....., is hereby acknowledged.

Kindly be advised that the contents thereof will be brought to ..... attention and you can contact the (job title, full names), ....., might you have any queries in this regard.

..... contact details are as follows:

Your office will be kept abreast of any development and you will receive a response within 14 days.

I trust that you find the above in order.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**NAME OF SUPERVISOR (Ms)**  
**TITLE: ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE CONSERVATION**