

SA's natural ecosystems offer protection from climate change ravages

Dr Jeanne Nel, conservation biologist at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), strongly feels that delivering "doom and gloom" environmental messages on the dire consequences of climate change, as well as talking about the need to become "greenies", leaves South Africans feeling hopeless.



She therefore presented her talk, entitled "Adapting to Climate Change the Natural Way", ahead of the upcoming global climate change talks in Durban, and told her audience about how South Africa's natural ecosystems could be used to protect the country from some of the worst impacts of climate change. According to Nel, climate change would bring with it gradually "warmer temperatures everywhere, more so in the interior".

Existing ecosystems could be adapted to climate change "by improving the resilience of landscapes," Nel said. This means using biodiversity and ecosystem services to cope with climate change and includes controlling invasive alien species, using wetlands to regulate floods, and using revegetation for carbon storage. "Healthy ecosystems provide...services that help us to adapt to climate change, which provide cost effective natural buffers to climate change. These networks of healthy ecosystems can be viewed as our ecological infrastructure," she concluded.

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