

Protecting our oceans and creating jobs

Dale Hes

One of government's themes for October is Marine Month, which focuses on the importance of ocean resources.

South Africa has the Indian and Atlantic oceans that are vital for food security, job creation and economic growth.

But in recent years, the world's oceans have been under huge pressure from over-fishing, pollution and climate change.

As a way of curbing this the government has been intensely focused on creating Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – ocean areas where human activities are restricted to allow marine life to recover. More than 40 of these areas now exist around our coastline.

Apart from allowing for better fishing in areas close to



the MPAs, these reserves have also opened up a wealth of job opportunities that benefit surrounding communities.

Many of South Africa's MPAs and coastal nature reserves are in the Western Cape, where provincial conservation agen-

cy CapeNature is tasked with managing them.

"CapeNature focuses its efforts and those of its partners on creating jobs within the conservation field – for example coastal monitors, and within other fields of tourism," said

CapeNature spokesperson Loren Pavitt.

Much of these job creation efforts are driven through CapeNature's People and Conservation Programme, which is aligned to the national Expanded Public Works

Programme (EPWP).

"We are increasing community participation in the management and enjoyment of protected areas, using these areas for the sustainable harvesting of natural resources and restoring traditional values and systems while relieving pressure on natural resources," Pavitt said.

In the past financial year, over 300 full-time equivalent jobs were created through the programme.

Coreen Coetzee is one of the programme beneficiaries at the Bird Island Nature Reserve in Lambert's Bay. She has been given the opportunity to be a conservation assistant, which she said has changed her life.

"It enables me to provide for my children and their future. I would like to thank CapeNature and the EPWP for the opportunity to do my part for conservation," said Coetzee. 