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Author: Staff Reporter

Tourism sector shows signs of recovery

THE increase in the number of visitors to the country's national parks is an indication that the tourism sector is recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, confirmed Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Barbara Creecy.

Creecy made the remarks at the launch of the National Parks Week last week.

"I am happy to report that in the 2021/22 financial year, the number of visitors to the country's national parks increased by 74% from 1 996 667, during the Covid-19 lockdowns of the 2020/21 financial year, to 3 482 514," Creecy said.

She said conservation and biodiversity management in developing countries is only sustainable if communities living adjacent to national parks benefit

directly from tourism and its associated ecosystems.

"Currently, South African National Parks (SANParks) and its concessionaires, employ over 6 100 people, 80% of whom are recruited from neighbouring communities. Through the expanded public works programme, a further 13 650 work opportunities were created last year and 835 SMMEs participated in providing goods and services to SANParks during the 2021/22 financial year."

In an effort to expand the economic opportunities in the national parks, earlier this year, SANParks hosted a conference where over 100 projects were launched seeking investment partnerships in accommodation, retail activities and restaurants in the national parks.