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Wild Coast economic zone has attracted investment of R1.07bn

At least 14 projects planned for the first phase of Mthatha's SEZ, says mayor

SIKHO NTSHOBANE

The Wild Coast special economic zone which the Eastern Cape provincial government plans to build near Mthatha Airport is starting to take shape and could create nearly 1,000 permanent jobs.

This is according to a report tabled by King Sabata Dalindyebo Local Municipality (KSD) mayor Nyaniso Nelani during a council meeting at Northcrest community hall on Wednesday.

In the report, Nelani informed councillors that four investment projects had been signed between the 2020/2021 financial years, with a combined value of R1.07bn.

"These are expected to create an estimated 968 operational jobs.

"Key industries are agro-processing and manufacturing, and the Coega Development Corporation is currently negotiating with potential investors.

"Coega has appointed a professional team to design and implement a wild foods project."

The mayor told the council at least 14 projects were planned for the first phase of the Wild Coast special economic zone (SEZ).

These included a tunnel/hydroponics farming project; a vegetable processing and packing facility; a freshwater fish processing and packing facility; a meat processing plant; cold storage facilities suitable for meat, vegetables and fruit; a fruit processing and packing facility; an essential oils processing plant;



TRANSPORT CORE: The SEZ project includes revitalising Mthatha airport and its surrounds as a key industrial node. Picture: SIKHO NTSHOBANE

silos for maize storage, a maize milling plant and a dairy processing facility with a warehouse.

Other development projects were a wool-sourcing facility, shared administrative and services facilities, and a multi-user agro-processing incubator aimed at similar and seasonal products.

Nelani's report recommended that a SEZ project steering committee be revived to speed up progress.

The SEZ project is aimed primarily at developing a solid manufacturing capability to enhance its economic competitiveness, grow the agro-processing sector in the Eastern Cape and revitalise Mthatha airport and its surrounds as a key industrial node.

UDM councillor Mzimkhulu Mpangele questioned whether the municipality had a proper plan in place to ensure communities would benefit from the initiative.

"Let us ensure our people are ready before

it [SEZ] starts.

"Instead of building this and later calling for people to come forward as agents, let us give them skills now so they are ready."

The EFF's Gcobani Rapiya warned the municipality to ensure the project benefited all KSD residents and not just those with connections to certain political parties.

Independent Sanco (Isanco) councillor Noxolo Kekezwa said the project would assist in the municipality's job-creation initiatives, and warned it should not be allowed to fizzle out.

"We hope it does not stall like other projects."

Nelani said the municipality was partnering with DICLA Training and Projects to capacitate people, especially the youth in the region, with farming and agricultural skills to get them ready for the SEZ.

According to its website, DICLA was established in 2008 to provide accredited training courses aligned to the SA Qualifications Authority, and unity standard requirements in the agricultural sector for the employed, unemployed, emerging farmers, youth, women and people with disabilities.

Addressing a co-operative summit last week, KSD municipality's local economic development director, Mbuyiseli Mandla, revealed the authority had secured about 34ha of vacant land near Ikhwezi township from the department of public works, which it hoped to use to transform its agricultural output.

About 700 young people would also be trained in agriculture and farming, Mandla said.