

We have one opportunity to save South Africa's natural heritage

By Hannah Shameema Winkler MP - DA Shadow Deputy Minister Environmental Affairs, Forestry and Fisheries

"Who are we? And what is our purpose?"

This is a question that human society's greatest thinkers have sought to answer. In the very small space of time that I have been on this planet (considering that the earth is estimated to be 4.54 billion years old), what has rung as the most fundamental truth is that we are here to create a better world for ourselves and for those that will come after us.

The 7 billion of us on the planet are in this together and we must act with purpose and urgency to address the climate crisis which threatens our very existence. South Africa has its role to play considering that 77% of our energy comes from coal and that some of the poorest and vulnerable communities are suffering under the weight of poisoned air. We must transition as quickly as possible to renewable energy to honour our commitments to the Paris Agreement.

We have an opportunity to gear South Africa towards a green economy where we can achieve economic growth, create clean, safe jobs, conserve our incredible biodiversity and increase South Africa's overall well-being. We need strong leadership and vision to do this though and we need all South Africans to join us in our mission.

If we continue to take too many steps in the wrong direction, we will end up destroying our natural heritage that we are world-renowned for.

The world is facing the sixth mass extinction, and yet this Government wants to remove the remaining protection of our iconic wildlife and allow them to be butchered for profit and consumption under the proposed amendment to the Meat Safety Act and our lions to be packed like sardines in small enclosures, some skin and bones, to be used and then shot in captive lion hunts.

How can we continue on a path where we have no reverence for life, for our planet? Where nothing holds sacred anymore, even though this earth has given us everything we need to survive and flourish? How can we repay her through exploitation, greed and short-sighted policies and legislation?

Something far greater hangs in the balance here. It is South Africa's pride and heritage, her soul that we are selling from beneath our feet. How can we allow this to happen under our watch? We have an opportunity now to stand up and lead. Honourable Minister Creecy, history will remember you for the decisions you have been entrusted to make.