

Democratic Alliance speech by  
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# No tangible plans on how the new Department of Environment will work

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**Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,**

At the onset of the 7th administration, the Premier announced the separation of the Environment Department from Agriculture and Rural Development. While this decision holds the potential to foster more focused environmental governance, we cannot ignore the glaring gaps that remain, chief among them the lack of specific plans and, crucially, the budget required to tackle Gauteng's urgent environmental challenges.

A healthy environment is not a matter of ecological preservation; it is fundamental to enabling our citizens to seize opportunities and create sustainable livelihoods. When our environment is degraded, these opportunities are not minimised; they are systematically eroded. A compromised environment actively works against our efforts to uplift the most vulnerable among us, creating a cycle of poverty and degradation that we must break.

In the State of the Province Address, the Premier highlighted the ambition to finalise Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) within 30 days. While we applaud the drive for efficiency, we must caution against sacrificing thoroughness on the altar of speed.

The Democratic Alliance (DA) believes in a balanced approach which streamlines processes without compromising the essential environmental safeguards that protect our communities and natural resources. EIAs and the decisions made by the relevant authorities must adhere to the highest possible standards to ensure that unacceptable developments are not authorised.

The Premier has also emphasised the significance of the Climate Change Act, which is intended to: "set the tone for the implementation of the Gauteng City Region Overarching Climate Change Response Strategy," a strategy approved by the Gauteng executive council four years ago. Yet, it is important to remember that the Act remains dormant, waiting for operational status until the President issues a proclamation, a delay that is deeply concerning. While we welcome the Premier's announcement of an upcoming Climate Change Indaba in October, it seems the implementation timelines are always moving. We must remind this House that four years after the strategy's approval, we have yet to see tangible progress.

The DA firmly believes environmental protection cannot be reduced to mere rhetoric. Gauteng, though the smallest province, is one of the most industrialised and densely populated, and it faces significant environmental challenges that demand urgent attention. Gauteng struggles with high levels of air pollution, posing a serious public health risk.

Gauteng's water infrastructure is crumbling, leaving residents across the province facing frequent water outages due to ageing pipes, insufficient maintenance, and poor planning. The province's heavy reliance on the Vaal River system is increasingly

threatened by pollution and erratic weather patterns, putting this vital resource under strain. Furthermore, rapid urbanisation and population growth have led to severe waste management challenges, with landfills nearing capacity and recycling programmes failing to keep pace with the growing volume of waste.

Urban sprawl continues to erode our natural habitats, leading to the destruction of green spaces and putting Gauteng's wildlife at risk. Addressing these issues requires coordinated policymaking, active community engagement, and the adoption of sustainable practices. We must work to mitigate environmental impacts and promote a healthier, more resilient environment for all Gauteng residents.

To this end, the DA proposes an increase in the number of Environmental Management Inspectors (EMIs) across all spheres of government, with a special focus on those specialising in enforcing legislation such as the National Environmental Management Act, the Air Quality Act, and the Waste Management Act.

The DA would prioritise a comprehensive overhaul of our water infrastructure, implementing smart water management systems, and investing in pipe replacement programmes to reduce water losses. In addition, we would launch a province-wide water conservation campaign, educating and promoting reduced water consumption and adoption of water-saving technologies and practices.

It is deeply disappointing that the Premier's address made no mention of biodiversity protection or the expansion of green spaces in our urban areas. Environmental protection is not solely about addressing climate change; it is about creating liveable, breathable cities that improve the quality of life for all residents. The DA proposes a Green Gauteng Initiative, focused on increasing urban green spaces, protecting our remaining natural areas, and implementing strict measures to combat air and water pollution.

In conclusion, while the Premier's address acknowledges some of the environmental challenges facing Gauteng, it falls short of offering concrete, funded, and achievable solutions. The DA presents a practical, action-oriented alternative that prioritises environmental stewardship and delivers real results for the people of Gauteng.

Thank you.

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