

# New report highlights opportunity for companies to improve their biodiversity performance

An initiative of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT), the National Biodiversity and Business Network (NBBN) has released a new report that highlights the low biodiversity performance of South African companies.



Titled *Invitation to Join the Biodiversity Disclosure Project – A Study of the Biodiversity Performance of South African Companies*, the report also presents an opportunity for these companies to improve their performance by participating in the Biodiversity Disclosure Project (BDP).

Biodiversity produces a wide variety of goods and services on which businesses depend. Examples include crop pollination, water filtration, flood attenuation, erosion control and raw materials. Businesses are critically dependent on these ecosystem services to produce their own products and services, and they also impact on biodiversity through their day-to-day activities, for example, through deforestation for the production of timber or through pollution from the release of waste products. These biodiversity dependencies and impacts create risks but may also present opportunities for South African businesses. At stake are the social and legal licences to operate, their production processes, access to finance, the timing of project delivery, and much more. The reputational damage to companies that blindly ignore these impacts may also be significant.

## Mandatory, voluntary disclosure requirements

The NBBN recognises that public and private South African companies are already subject to onerous mandatory and voluntary disclosure requirements which may also include reporting on the impacts of business on our natural world. But this report identified a key gap in which businesses are currently not disclosing, and reporting on their impacts and dependencies on biodiversity within the broader sustainability agenda.

This report presents the result of a NBBN study, which aimed to assess and compare the biodiversity mainstreaming performance of all Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listed companies and two state-owned enterprises. This assessment was conducted in 2018 using publically available information, including company websites and 2017-18 integrated or sustainability reports. Each company was contacted electronically to offer them the opportunity to review their individual results and share any additional information if warranted.

The results of the study suggest that South African companies are performing poorly in the area of biodiversity mainstreaming. Despite some leadership from a small number of companies, for the majority of the companies assessed, there is generally a need for greater:

- Recognition of the importance of biodiversity to business and its stakeholders;
- Understanding of business-biodiversity dependencies and impacts and the associated benefits / assets and costs / liabilities;
- Knowledge of how to recognise, measure, value, and responsively manage the direct and indirect dependencies and impacts on biodiversity; and
- Understanding of how to report on corporate biodiversity performance in a structured and standardised manner.

## **Driving broad business action**

Accordingly, the EWT's NBBN calls for the private sector to join the growing network of companies that are initiating steps towards addressing biodiversity reporting. The BDP will drive broad business action in the area of biodiversity mainstreaming in South Africa within the next three years. To achieve this goal, the BDP team, in collaboration with stakeholders, will develop:

- A BDP platform, which will provide companies with a practical avenue through which to voluntarily disclose their biodiversity impacts, risks and performance on an annual basis.
- A Biodiversity Measurement Protocol (BMP), which will enable companies to measure and monitor their biodiversity impacts over time.
- An Online Mainstreaming Biodiversity Into Business Toolkit, which will build the capacity of businesses to better recognise, measure, value and responsively manage their direct and indirect dependencies and impacts on biodiversity.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>