

Speech notes by Ross Purdon, MPL - Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism

Hon Speaker
Hon Premier
Honourable Members
All our guests in the gallery

Good afternoon to you all.

According to the latest Eastern Cape Economic Review, our South African economy is growing at a miserable 0,6%.

This report also tells us that the Eastern Cape is the 4th largest economy in South Africa contributing an average 7,58% to the country's G.D.P.

The largest negative contributions (both nationally and in the province) were experienced by the manufacturing sector and the agricultural sector.

It is also interesting to note that in the past 5 years, the Eastern Cape's trade deficit has increased significantly from R1, 3 billion in 2011 to R11 billion in 2015. R45 billion in exports compared to R56 billion imports. This is certainly a disturbing deficit. At the same time we have up to 8, 9 million people in South Africa who are unemployed – most of them are young people.

We are also heading towards a ratings downgrade and a ratings downgrade (according to leading economists) could trigger a recession putting hundreds of thousands more jobs at risk.

It is against this gloomy background that we focus on the report before us.

An important finding under Environmental Affairs receives our total support.

The Compliance and Environment budget has been increased by just over R25 million.

Rhino poaching has reached desperate levels and any efforts to combat this have to be supported.

I would like to suggest that the Department combines its efforts with the Private Sector if it is not doing so already.

One of the other findings in this report emphasizes the fact that the agro-processing sector is severely handicapped by the limited supply of raw materials or the underdevelopment of primary production. The recommendation suggests a conference for stakeholders at all levels to meet and strategize a way forward.

This is a crucial finding. Much talk around the proposed Wild Coast SEZ is focused on agro-processing.

Now we have a proposal tabled by the ECDC on the revitalization of Dimbaza.

Let me remind members that Dimbaza is presently an underutilized, industrial site just outside of King Williams Town on the road to Alice.

Dimbaza is mainly owned by the ECDC. 78% of this site is at present not occupied. Out of the 23 sites that are occupied, six are funeral services and two are churches.

The proposed revitalization of Dimbaza presented by the ECDC hinges totally on agro-processing.

A R322 million revitalization program relying on co-ops and other small scale collectives within reasonable reach of Dimbaza.

Phase 1 is to privilege co-operative farmers within a solar radius of Dimbaza.

These co-ops or feeder producers to this eco-industrial park are meant to supply vegetables, livestock, berries, essential oils and aloes.

Given the non-performance of the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform highlighted in my speech yesterday, this project has little to no chance of succeeding.

I am afraid to say that while this revitalization plan might look good on paper, I am predicting a disaster!

We will also probably discover down the line that much of the R322 million would have been spent on feasibility studies, designs and planning! Mark my words.

Hon Speaker, allow me to change the subject.

The recent plundering of our precious ocean resources by foreign fishing vessels has been well documented lately. The fact that this situation had to be brought to the authorities by amateurs and fishermen is of great concern. These are the same fishermen who are side-lined by strict regulations.

There is much hype around operation Phakisa and unlocking our ocean economy. At the present rate, there won't be anything left to unlock.

To stop this rape of our reserves will take a concerted and combined effort.

I would like to remind both the Department and ECPTA (Eastern Cape Parks & Tourism Agency) which reports to the Department, that that they cannot just sit back and wait for the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to act.

In recent answers to our committee's questions, the ECPTA explained the complexity of mandates relating to environmental management.

Marine protected areas assigned by the National Department of Environmental Affairs to the ECPTA are to protect the inshore areas. These boats were seen in our

inshore areas.

I don't think it serves much purpose to blame anyone but I would like to appeal to DAFF, the Navy, ECPTA and the Department to co-operate, share ideas and responsibilities so as to assure that this illegal fishing is stopped once and for all. This must be a concerted, combined effort.

Hon Speaker, this is not the only rape of our natural resources taking place in our province.

Illegal sand mining is out of control and in reply to questions to the MEC; he did explain that it is the Department of Mineral Resources that is the competent authority to manage all mining in the province.

Again, I would like to appeal to the Department to make sure that DMR are doing their work. The Department has a duty to protect our environment and must ensure that DMR fulfils their mandate.

Another sad chapter was highlighted during question time yesterday. MEC Somyo told us that R2, 5 million would be spent on legal fees relating to the Medbury Farm (that is owned by Hennie le Roux). We were also told that the value of the game lost equaled R15 million.

The Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency lost the court case so this has been a R17,5 million lesson to the Agency and the Department.

The Agency must ensure that all the other reserves are adequately enclosed as a matter of urgency.

Hon Speaker

I am certain that many of the failings of Government boil down to bad communication.

I have previously mentioned the necessity for the Navy, DAFF, ECPTA and the Department to work together.

I also mentioned the importance of the Department of Mineral Resources and the Department of combining their efforts.

Last year, we had the Visa debacle with no communication between Home Affairs and Tourism which cost our country many millions.

A few weeks ago Minister Hanekom complained that they had not been consulted ahead of the recently imposed sport ban and I quote the Minister, "Tourism interfaces with many other departments. Decisions taken elsewhere (by other Ministers) could impact positively or negatively on tourism. So the process of engaging fellow Ministers is not going very well." Close quote

Hon Speaker

I would like to make a sincere appeal to all Ministers, MEC's, Departments and entities to improve their communication so we can all work towards the positive growth of our economy in both our province and our country. That is our duty!

The DA supports the report.

Thank you.