ABI in the Overberg

Foundations of the ABI Re-visioning Process

Report to the ABI Partners and Stakeholders

Support and funding provided by WWF Nedbank Green Trust

Photo: Grootbos Foundation

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Prosper with Nature

November 2021

Table of Contents

Background to this report

This report captures the results of an assignment carried out in October and November 2021, to assist the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) to develop appropriate institutional and financial arrangements for the next decade. This forms part of the development process of a 10-year-strategy, a participatory process undertaken through the WWF Nedbank Green Trust-funded project on "Revisioning the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative for the next decade"[1]. It commenced in June 2020 and had to be adjusted to accommodate the COVID-19 lockdown that prevented face-to-face meetings and workshops. As per the Terms of Reference (Annex 1), the assignment aims to highlight the key conservation and development issues at stake, and evaluate the current ABI structure in responding to these issues, and propose appropriate institutional and financial options for the achievement of the long-term goal, based on its achievements, lessons learnt and best practice.

The project has built on previous investments, including the GEF-funded ABI project, acknowledging that the conservation of the unrivalled and globally important Cape Floristic Region (CFR), alongside the entrenched socio-economic disparities of the region, offers a complex setting for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) partners and stakeholders. This assignment set out to test the hypothesis that the need for an integrated, comprehensive and participatory approach to conservation and development in the region remains clear and compelling, and could better equip ABI partners to ensure both the well-being of the people living within the CFR and the very future of this globally significant biome.

Carried out on behalf of Flower Valley Conservation Trust, in the context of the Trust handing over the coordination of the ABI partnership to the ABI Committee, the assignment required the consultant to carry out the following steps:

- Supplement the participatory process undertaken through the WWF Nedbank Green Trust-funded project on "Revisioning the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative for the next decade" with additional stakeholder consultations on a framework for the way forward, including institutional and financial options
- Review the current Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative's (ABI) structure in relation to its overall objective and recent consultations on its long-term goal and 10-year plan;
- Present three options for the long-term governance and institutional structure of ABI to fulfil these goals;
- Present appropriate possible financing options for the initiative;
- And write a report summarizing the work done in context of the wider revisioning process.

In addition to forming part of the reporting package from the Flower Valley Conservation Trust to the Green Trust, these outputs will be presented to the ABI Committee for their consideration, discussion, and decision on the way forward from 2022. Because of the fortuitous timing of the ABI Annual General Meeting, held in the middle of the consultancy period, it was also possible to test the water on the recommendations coming out of the process, and get a mandate at the AGM for some initial

[1] https://www.greentrust.org.za/2020/06/08/conservation-collaboration-in-the-overberg/

steps, approved before the AGM by the ABI Committee members. Throughout the consultancy period, the consultant participated in weekly meetings of the subcommittee (with representatives of the ABI Committee and Flower Valley staff) that was charged with overseeing completion of the project.

During two weeks in October the consultant accompanied the ABI Coordinator, Lesley Richardson, in travelling around the Overberg region holding face-to-face meetings (now possible under lockdown Level 1) with individuals and small groups of key ABI partners, discussing with them their responses to the ABI partner survey conducted in the second half of 2021, particularly on what they felt they could gain from and contribute to the ABI partnership in Phase 3. In total, discussions were held with 55 people from a wide range of ABI partner organizations. These were not formal interviews, but were used to enable partners to brainstorm on creative new ideas and raise concerns freely. Questions that were touched on during the discussions, as per the terms of reference, included the following:

1. What has come out of the revisioning process so far in terms of ABI's long term goals and plans?
2. How can ABI of the 2020s take forward the overall objective of the partnership to "foster biodiversity through sustainable and integrated socio-cultural, economic and environmental development in the Overberg"?
3. Should ABI be primarily an umbrella for coordination, learning and information-sharing between partners, or should it be set up also to undertake some joint initiatives towards shared goals?
4. Can ABI leverage the success of its individual partners for greater conservation and development outcomes, including government, non-governmental and civil society partners?
5. Does ABI need to be an advocacy agency, and what are the areas in which there is full agreement across the partnership?
6. Can ABI leverage greater land-owner support for functions such as monitoring and evaluation?
7. Can ABI better integrate resources and initiatives aimed at integrated and proactive management of fire, alien invasives and water?
8. Can ABI contribute to the coordination of research and data sharing in the Overberg? Can ABI leverage stronger partnerships with research and tertiary institutions?
9. Can ABI help partners to stimulate the green economy in the Overberg, creating jobs and opportunities for skills development and small businesses?
10. What are options for the institutional model for ABI going forward, and can the potential models be funded sustainably?

The results of these consultations, as well as the report on the ABI online survey, which gathered data through an in-depth Institutional Survey (35 responses) and an in-depth Business Survey (22 responses), were used to inform the 'Next Steps' presented at the AGM, as well as the more detailed recommendations contained in this report. A list of the partners and stakeholders with whom meetings were held is attached as Annex 3. These included the 'ABI Inheritors', a subset of the ABI database covering longstanding partners with an in-depth knowledge of ABI's past, who were also well placed to help envision its future. Conducting these discussions with such a wide range of knowledgeable, passionate and committed stakeholders has been fascinating and a great pleasure.

Cape Town, 23 November 2021

ABI in the Overberg Phase 3

The ABI landscape initiative and partnership have existed for nearly two decades, including two distinct phases. Phase 1 was focused around the Global Environment Facility-funded and United Nations Development Programme-supported project that ran from 2003-2010 and set up ABI as one of seven landscape initiatives under the wider Cape Action for People and the Environment (CAPE) partnership. In Phase 2 from 2010 to 2020, the continuing stakeholder partnership took the form of a voluntary association known as the "Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) in the Overberg". An ABI Constitution[2] was finalized in 2011 through a facilitated, participatory process, with a Committee of 8-10 members elected at each Annual General Meeting, arranging quarterly partner meetings, and maintaining an online presence through its communications programme.

From 2013 to 2021 the secretariat of ABI was hosted by the NGO Flower Valley Conservation Trust, with this function overseen by the elected ABI Committee on behalf of the 53 ABI partners, 26 of them organizations (Annex 2: List of ABI Partners). The Flower Valley-based secretariat also coordinated activities on behalf of the ABI partnership, including a Table Mountain Fund small grants programme that ran from 2013 to 2016, and nine years of continuous work accessing national government funds for clearing of invasive alien vegetation by ABI landowner partners, largely on the Agulhas Plain, alongside Flower Valley Conservation Trust's own sustainable flower harvesting and early childhood development activities.

Throughout this time, the greatest strength of ABI has arguably remained its social capital – the relationships, trust and networks that have been built up over the past 19 years. As outlined in the original project proposal to the WWF Nedbank Green Trust, a crucial aspect of ABI's longevity is the fact that it is driven from the ground up, since all the people, leaders and organisations involved are based in the Overberg and have a vested interest in ABI's success. In addition, there is substantial will, expertise and experience within the wide range of individuals, NGOs, community-based organizations, government agencies, farms and business enterprises represented in the dynamic ABI partnership. In 2021, with the Flower Valley Conservation Trust announcing it will end its role in the wider landscape and its services to the ABI partnership, it has become necessary to put new coordination mechanisms into place anyway, and the task of thinking through how to do this has been fed into the terms of reference for the Green Trust project in general and this consultancy in particular, overseen by the ABI Committee.

The consultancy has drawn from an online survey conducted in the second half of 2021 and a series of one-to-one and small group meetings with key partners conducted by the consultant and Lesley Richardson, ABI Coordinator, during October 2021. A full analysis of the results of the survey, which included 22 small businesses involved in alien clearing, flower harvesting and other green economy sectors as well as 35 institutions, is included in the overall ABI report to the Green Trust. Trends emerging from the survey, as well as the individual discussions, have fed into the production of this sub-report and its recommendations. Although a wide variety of views were expressed by partners, there was a large degree of commonality around seven key points, which are outlined below.

[2] https://agulhasbiodiversity.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/abi_constitution.pdf

ABI is highly valued, and should continue as a network and landscape initiative

The overriding sense from the survey and consultations was that ABI is still highly valued by the partners, who remain committed to its continuation into a third decade. ABI's value can be understood in two distinct ways – firstly as a network of partners who communicate, share information and learn from each other, and secondly as a landscape initiative that is able to coordinate selected partner activities towards shared goals, and provide a platform for innovation, resourcing and collaboration.

As a network of partners, ABI can be visualized as a three-dimensional network of interconnected nodes – with each node representing a partner organization that deals directly with many others. At certain points, where many partners' activities and interests come together, a large node of common interest or activity is created, as seen in the four themes of ABI Phase 2: (Land Use Planning & Management, Green Economy, Environmental Education, Responsible Tourism – more on the themes later); or as seen in specific areas of common activity, such as clearing of invasive alien plants. The survey responses reflect a continued core focus by partners on nature and its conservation. The NGO partners who form the core of the ABI network, working closely with landowners and communities, are all focused on conservation – Flower Valley Conservation Trust, the Fynbos Trust, Grootbos Foundation, Nuwejaars Wetlands Special Management Area, Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust, Dyer Island Conservation Trust, and Whale Coast Conservation.

In the diagrammatic representation of the network in Figure 1, nature conservation is shown as the red centre of the ABI network, with the red connectors linking to the original partners who came together in 2003 to protect and restore the globally valuable biodiversity of the Agulhas Plain. As the partnership has developed and grown, these partners have become increasingly connected to other partners whose work is connected to nature, but who are primarily focused on other areas – for example, job creation and small business development (the yellow connections), or sustainable agricultural practices (the white connections). In Phase 3, many partners have expressed a desire to continue to develop and widen the network, acknowledging the importance of natural ecosystems and the services they provide in underpinning the economy of the Overberg region.

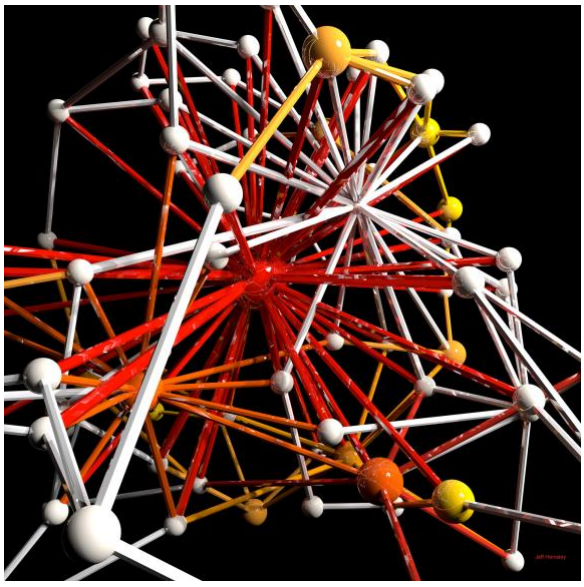


Figure 1: A diagrammatic representation of ABI as a network of partners

As a landscape initiative, ABI remains committed to tackling the challenges facing the Overberg region, whose life-supporting natural systems are under threat from a number of directions: increasing invasions by alien plants in the catchments and beyond, increases in unseasonal fires and ongoing transformation of natural areas through urban development and unsustainable agricultural practices. Climate change is set to exacerbate the situation, with increasing temperatures, erratic rainfall, and the possibility of more droughts and floods. The Overberg is also facing serious poverty levels, with over 50% of those living in the Overberg either unemployed or in the very low-income category, and youth unemployment estimated at over 60%. The population continues to grow, due to migration from other parts of the country, putting strain on infrastructure and natural resources, especially freshwater systems. These challenges remain, and many have worsened with the loss of income during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the tourism and hospitality sectors. At the same time, there is a sense in the ABI partnership of exciting new opportunities, as businesses start to mushroom utilizing cleared alien biomass, and more private sector partners come on board.

Although active involvement in the wider CAPE partnership is limited to a few members of the ABI Committee, the partners are kept in touch through report-backs, and ABI continues to function as one of the nine landscape initiatives[3] which are signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding of CAPE – Cape Action for People and the Environment, a partnership of 38 government and civil society bodies. This Cape Floristic Region-wide conservation and development partnership was established in 2001 and was brought to life through a larger South African Government-GEF partnership parallel to the ABI project, from 2004 to 2010, continued through a new 10-year strategy from 2012[4]. The box below explains the concept of a landscape initiative – working both within and beyond protected areas to create a mosaic of land uses in which biodiversity compatibility is maximised. The ABI partnership has been represented on the CAPE Implementation Committee, and attends the bi-annual Landscape Initiative Knowledge Exchange (LIKE).

The "CAPE" Landscape Initiatives

The CAPE partnership applies a landscape-level approach to biodiversity conservation, through "landscape initiatives" that take various forms, including corridor initiatives, mega-reserves and biosphere reserves. This approach provides for an appropriate scale at which to engage local role-players in the promotion of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Role-players, including government, conservation agencies, communities, non-governmental organisations and the private

[3] Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative, Baviaanskloof Mega Reserve, Cape West Coast Biosphere Reserve, Cape Winelands Biosphere Reserve, Garden Route Biosphere Initiative, Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve, Greater Cederberg Biodiversity Corridor, Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, Upper Breede Collaborative Extension Group

[4] For a review of the extent to which the CAPE partnership was able to achieve the original vision that by the year 2020, 'the co-operation of capable institutions' will have ensured that 'the biodiversity of the CFR is conserved, restored, effectively managed and sustainably utilised, delivering significant benefits to the people of the region in a way that is embraced by local communities, endorsed by government and recognised internationally', see SANBI (2021) *Cape Legacy Project: Final Report* at http://opus.sanbi.org/bitstream/20.500.12143/7196/1/CAPE%20LEGACY%20PROJECT%20_%20FINAL%20REPORT%20_%20200910.pdf

sector, co-ordinate strategically and undertake joint projects – working within and beyond protected areas to create a mosaic of land uses in which biodiversity compatibility is maximised.

Many parts of the fynbos biome are dominated by agricultural production or urban development, and it is no longer possible to set aside large, pristine areas to conserve biodiversity and sustain ecological processes. It is also not affordable for conservation agencies to purchase all the land identified as high priority in terms of habitat or threatened ecosystems to add it to our system of state-owned protected areas. A landscape-scale approach looks at sustainable management of various land uses, where people live and work in harmony with nature and within the natural resource limits of the landscape.

Central to this approach is the creation of corridors of continuous natural habitat across the landscape, which include formally protected areas as well as valuable biodiversity on privately owned land protected through biodiversity stewardship agreements, which can maintain or restore connectivity across the landscape, preserving biodiversity pattern and habitats. Corridors also play a vital role in the survival of species in the context of climate change, since species are enabled to move from a warmer to a cooler region, or vice versa, along an established corridor. *www.sanbi.org*

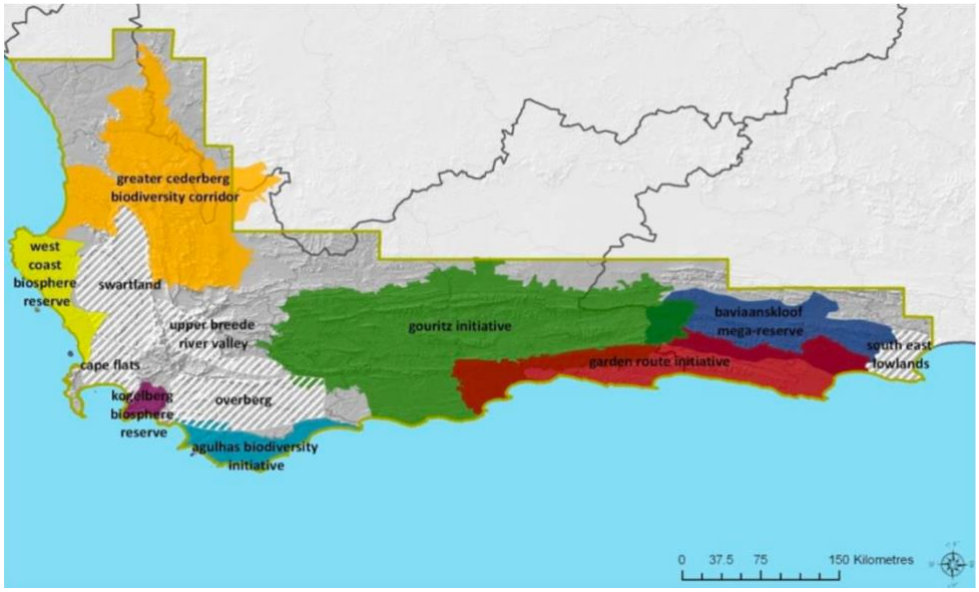


Figure 2: Map of CAPE Landscape Initiatives from Gelderblom, C, (2011) 10 Years of CAPE

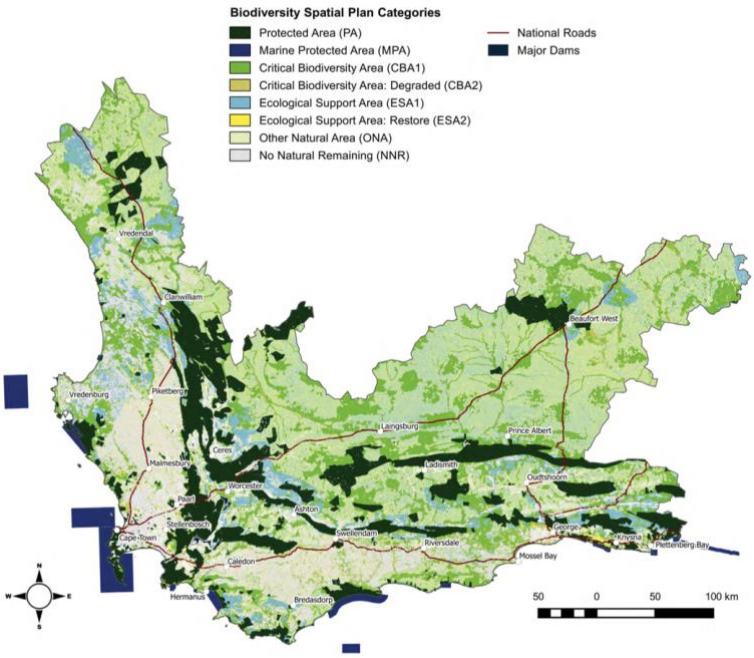
The map above from 2011 shows the original seven CAPE landscape initiatives[5] in the colour blocks, established in the parts of the Cape Floristic Region that include significant remaining areas of relatively intact natural habitat. The diagonal shading shows areas that were predominantly transformed by agriculture (or urban development) but retained important fragments of endangered and critically endangered biodiversity. The latter category includes the wheat-belt farming areas of

5 https://www.sanbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/sustainininglifeinthefynbos.pdf

the Overberg District, which contain remnants of important threatened lowland Renosterveld[6] vegetation. Since this map was made, the Gouritz Initiative and the Garden Route Initiative have both become UNESCO-registered Biosphere Reserves, bringing the total number of CFR biospheres to five.

The concentration of important natural habitats – both Critical Biodiversity Areas and Ecological Support Areas – in the southern half of the Overberg district can be seen clearly on the map below from the provincial Biodiversity Spatial Plan[7]. This suggests that ABI activities related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and the threats posed to these by alien vegetation and uncontrolled wildfire, should logically be focused in the southern part of the district. On the other hand, activities related to more sustainable agricultural practices would need to include the northern half of the district, which is mostly transformed by agriculture, with little remaining habitat until one gets to the Mountain Catchment Area of the Langeberg at the district boundary. This wider scope would enable a "catchment to coast" approach, whereby it is acknowledged that practices upstream have an impact downstream in an interconnected system – for example, a farmer in the Rûens who ploughs right up to the riverbank and destabilizes the soil can cause erosion contributing to siltation of the Breede River estuary downstream that provides an essential breeding ground for indigenous fish species. The issue of geographical scope of ABI is discussed in the section on multiple scales.

Figure 3: CBAs and ESAs on the Agulhas Plain, shown in the 2017 Western Cape Biodiversity Spatial Plan



[6] https://overbergrenosterveld.org.za/

[7]The Western Cape BSP Handbook 2017 is available as a downloadable PDF on the CapeNature website at: https:// www.capenature.co.za/wp-content/ uploads/2017/12/DEADP_CN_WCBSP_ Handbook_2017.compressed-ilovepdf-compressed.pdf
The Western Cape BSP Map as well as municipal-level shapefiles can be accessed via the Biodiversity GIS website at: http://bgis.sanbi.org/ Projects/Detail/194.
The BSP Map is hosted on a viewing platform on CapeFarmMapper, a product of the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, which can be accessed at: https://gis.elsenburg. com/apps/cfm/

The ABI objective remains valid, as well as the 'five Cs'

ABI's overall objective as defined in 2011, is *"to foster biodiversity through sustainable and integrated socio-cultural, economic and environmental development in the Overberg".* In the survey responses and partner discussions, ABI partners have suggested no changes to this objective, which remains a good fit with the focus and scope of ABI partners' activities: on the one hand it retains the core focus on biodiversity, and on the other hand it simultaneously acknowledges the need for an integrated approach that includes the social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability.

In particular, maintaining the breadth of scope as "*sustainable and integrated socio-cultural, economic and environmental development"* enables ABI in Phase 3 to increase its emphasis on maximizing opportunities for work, skills training and small business development in the nature-based economy, taking advantage of increasing opportunities for government support, and business investment in 'green economy' activities such as renewable energy, biomass value addition, the wildlife sector, sustainable harvesting and cultivation of indigenous plant species. During ABI Phase 2 it was recognized that there remains untapped potential for addressing the socio-economic aspects of ABI's objective, and this has only become more pressing with rising youth unemployment and the need for a 'green recovery' post-COVID.

The focus on "*the Overberg"* also remains valid, and there is an acknowledgment by partners that Phase 2 saw only a nominal expansion of ABI activities into the rest of the Overberg (see next section). While the emphasis at the time of the GEF project was on working across the landscape to shift the mosaic of land uses over time towards greater compatibility with biodiversity, for example, moving from sheep farming to buffalo, or from unsustainable wildflower harvesting to sustainable harvesting, there has also been a broadening of focus to farmlands dominated by wheat, canola, barley, oats, lucerne and livestock, aiming to promote sustainable land management practices.

On the one hand, this widening of focus in the past decade to areas dominated by farmland (diagonal lines on CAPE map) through growing initiatives such as the Upper Breede Collaborative Extension Group (UBCEG) and the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust (ORCT) reflects the desire to protect and connect remaining fragments of natural habitat, and prevent their invasion by alien vegetation. On the other hand, this broadening of scope also reflects a growing emphasis in South Africa, and globally, on promoting sustainable and regenerative farming practices that contribute to the health of freshwater ecosystems, soil productivity and carbon sequestration.

The 'Five Cs', coined in the final evaluation of the GEF project, and adopted in 2011, are widely seen as remaining relevant for ABI:

1. Convene interested and affected parties
2. Collate information and data
3. Communicate with all parties
4. Conceptualise projects and initiatives
5. Capitalise priority activities

More detail on each of these is contained in the next section.

A general sentiment was expressed that being part of ABI should help the partners to do what they already do, more effectively and with more resources, rather than creating additional work for them, or requiring them to act beyond their current mandates (e.g. municipalities) or priorities (e.g.

landowners). For many of the issues covered by the ABI partnership, the first three roles are sufficient – **convene**, **collate** and **communicate**. An example here would be the Green Economy theme, and issues within that, e.g. adding value to cleared alien biomass, or harvesting of wildflowers. The sense within the partnership is that ABI has a critical role here in bringing people together, to learn about new opportunities, approaches and technologies, and to facilitate smaller working partnerships between particular ABI partners, who might decide between themselves to cooperate on a new initiative or undertake joint fundraising. These would be partners' own initiatives, but they would not have been catalysed without the existence of the ABI partnership, which creates the space for innovation and collaboration.

This can be distinguished from the **conceptualise** and **capitalise** roles of the ABI partnership, which it is felt should be limited to areas on which there is agreement that collective action needs to be taken. For 2022-2023 the most important area for collective action is seen as alien clearing, including its ecological restoration aspects and links to fire management (discussed further below). This is because invasion by alien plants represents a massive threat – and also an opportunity – in the historical ABI focus area – a contributor to fire hazard, a threat to water security, to the already struggling wildflower industry, and to the survival of many fynbos species endemic to the region, as well as endangered bird, amphibian and mammal species. These threats, and the opportunities presented by the upscaling of invasive alien removal and control, in terms of work opportunities, small business development, and stimulation of value-added industries, are outlined in more detail below. The AGM of October 2021 gave a strong mandate to ABI not only to provide strategic coordination of alien clearing and fire management activities, but also to unlock further resources from both public and private sectors to scale up such activities significantly.

ABI can operate at multiple scales in the medium term

One of the topics on which there has been much discussion and debate is that of ABI's geographical focus going forward. For background to this discussion, it is useful to understand where ABI's activities have been focused historically in Phases 1 and 2. During Phase 1 with the UNDP-GEF project, the area in which activities were undertaken was centred on the Agulhas Plain, arising from the project's aim to support biodiversity stewardship by private landowners in the buffer zone of Agulhas National Park, where much valuable biodiversity was located, including in the Nuwejaars Wetland Area (which also benefited from a follow-up investment by the German Government's International Climate Initiative from 2009 to 2011). As the project was established, its geographical scope was extended westwards to incorporate partners such as the NGO Whale Coast Conservation, and eastwards to include the important De Hoop Provincial Nature Reserve, as shown by the yellow line on the map. The project's focus was on terrestrial biodiversity, and it covered terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems, down to the estuaries.

Figure 4: Map of ABI Phase 1 & 2 boundaries[8]

In 2011, with the decision to continue the ABI partnership beyond the life of the GEF project, a voluntary association known as the 'Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) in the Overberg' was formed for Phase 2. At this point the ABI community decided to allow for the borders of its activities to extend to the boundaries of the Overberg District. The Constitution of the voluntary association (Annex 4), finalized in 2012, makes it clear that the 'ABI in the Overberg Community' includes organisations and individuals operating across the Overberg District.

During Phase 2, there was some outreach beyond the initial ABI area, to for instance the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust which operates across the Rûens area, as well as a number of Overberg-wide organisations such as the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association, the Breede Gourtiz Catchment Management Agency, and the Overberg Water Board. There was some limited engagement with partners in the more remote parts of the Swellendam and Theewaterskloof municipalities, such as the Grootvadersbosch Conservancy, who were also recipients of funds under the DEA Landuser Incentive Scheme. It was felt by some partners that more outreach by the ABI Committee in support of conservation work beyond the Agulhas Plain would have been desirable, while others felt that this was not realistically possible.

The highest profile activity of the ABI partnership from 2013 onwards was the ABI Alien Clearing Project – working with landowners to clear and manage water-thirsty woody invasive alien plants, using national government funding through the Natural Resource Management programme of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (the subject of a full assessment report, submitted to Green Trust as part of the reporting package). This work was focused on a geographical area that was narrower than both Phase 1 and 2 ABI areas, as its origins were in the alien clearing efforts of the 49-landowner strong Walker Bay Fynbos Conservancy, of which Flower Valley is a member (and part of which has become the Walker Bay Protected Environment in November 2021). Alien clearing efforts were concentrated in six quaternary catchments with severe alien infestations – the Klein, Uilkraal, Jan Swartskraal, Ratel, Nuwejaars and Heuningnes catchments.

[8] https://www.greentrust.org.za/2020/06/08/conservation-collaboration-in-the-overberg-news/

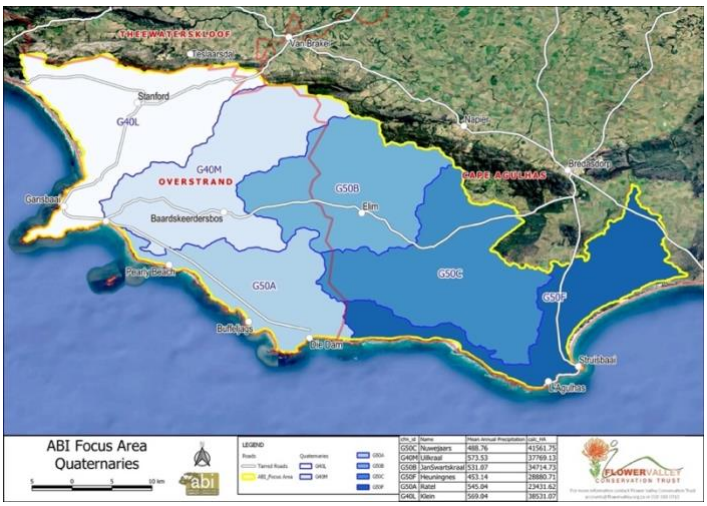


Figure 5: Map showing quaternary catchments where the ABI Alien Clearing Project was focused

Putting all of this together in order to decide how to move forward, the map below was drawn showing three different geographical areas:

- 'ABI Narrow' shows the boundaries of the GEF-funded ABI era and ABI Alien Clearing Project coordinated by Flower Valley Conservation Trust for ABI partners in the six focal quaternary catchments
- 'ABI' Wide shows the de facto focus area of ABI Phase 2 as a whole, including the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust focus area south of the N2
- The widest boundary shows the potential area in which ABI could hypothetically work, if it wished to cover all of the Overberg District.

It should be noted that parts of the Overberg District already fall into other existing landscape initiatives. The western tip of the Overstrand Local Municipality is in the existing Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve, and a part of the Swellendam Local Municipality is included in the western part of the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve. The wider boundary covering the whole Overberg District includes the area of each of four local municipalities: Theewaterskloof, Overstrand, Agulhas and Swellendam.

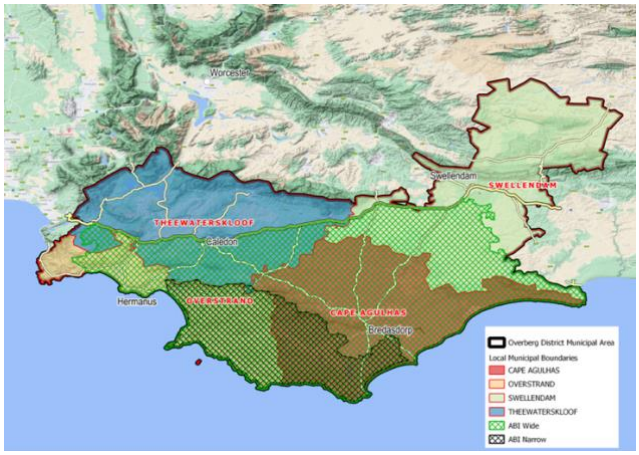


Figure 6: Potential boundaries for the Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

The proposal made at the ABI Annual General Meeting on 27th October 2021 was that in the next couple of years as ABI embarks on Phase 3, it is not an either-or choice. Instead, ABI should consider

maintaining this approach of having different geographical focus areas for different activities, and could, for example:

- Remain as "ABI in the Overberg" for now, and invite stakeholders from across the Overberg District to become partners and participate in general ABI activities like partner meetings
- Take an appropriate geographical focus when planning joint priority activities, with alien clearing focused on the area of high biodiversity combined with high alien infestation – as in ABI Phase 2
- Investigate establishing a Biosphere Reserve which could be called the "Overberg Biosphere Reserve"[9] and could potentially cover a wide area across the majority of the Overberg District (see section below).
- Once the Biosphere Reserve is established, partners could decide to discontinue ABI, and ABI Partners could all become Biosphere Reserve Members instead.
- Alternatively, if it is felt that the ABI structure is best placed to continue to serve specific needs at the level of the Agulhas Plain, within the wider Biosphere, it could be continued in parallel and its objectives adjusted as necessary.

A new coordination function is necessary, not linked to single partner identity

The role of Flower Valley Conservation Trust (FVCT) in providing the secretariat to the ABI partnership, whilst much welcomed and appreciated, was also the cause of some confusion. This was because FVCT was itself one of the ABI member organizations, as well as playing the wider role in hosting the ABI partnership coordination function. So whilst the Trust was often engaged in seeking funding on behalf of a wide range of ABI partners, e.g. for NRM alien clearing, it was also fundraising for its own independent activities around sustainable harvesting and early childhood development support.

Such confusion may have been exacerbated by the fact that Flower Valley and ABI branding was sometimes used simultaneously - especially in the context of the ABI Alien Clearing Project - and it was not always easy to understand the different roles and resource streams. This factor was also possibly present during Phase 1, where the coordination of the GEF project was undertaken by Agulhas National Parks on behalf of a range of stakeholders. For this reason, a neutral coordination function is preferred amongst stakeholders for Phase 3, directly under the ABI Committee, and not centred in one partner organization. A coordination team could potentially be based physically at the premises of one of the partner organizations, as an in-kind contribution from such a partner to the partnership's operating costs, but should maintain its own identity and use only the ABI branding for communication purposes.

At the Annual General Meeting, the partners re-elected all the ABI Committee members for an additional term of office until October 2022. The Committee was given the go-ahead to take over the administrative and hosting functions being handed over by Flower Valley Conservation Trust at the end of November 2021. The Committee was mandated to set up a bank account for ABI, to register the existing voluntary association as a non-profit organization with the Department of Social Development, and to apply to South African Revenue Services for status as a Public Benefit Organization (which makes donations tax-deductible in terms of Section 18A). The ABI Committee needs as a matter of urgency to raise funds, in order to run its own coordination unit to carry out the secretariat function effectively.

[9] The name "Greater Agulhas Biosphere Reserve" was also suggested.

Being part of ABI should help with fundraising and not hinder it

One subject which came up with many stakeholders was the ongoing challenge of ensuring the financial sustainability of their work. With the changes in the funding landscape as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations have been battling to raise funds, and are aware of the reality that there is sometimes competition between ABI partners who may have donor partners in common. This situation cannot be avoided, but it can be managed by avoiding a situation in which one of the partner organizations plays the role of secretariat for the whole partnership, simultaneously fundraising for itself and for others.

Stakeholders felt that it would be important for all ABI partners to be able to continue their own independent resource mobilization activities. Being part of ABI can add value to these efforts by helping organizations to demonstrate how their work is contributing effectively to wider strategic objectives shared by the partnership as a whole. The ABI website and social media platforms could also be used to make available to ABI partners up-to-the-minute information on funding opportunities, tenders for contract work, and requests for proposals in relevant spheres, helping to ensure a level playing field in terms of knowledge of such opportunities.

In general, it was felt that joint fundraising by particular pairs or groups of ABI partners would be desirable as and when the opportunity arose. Participation in ABI working groups and quarterly meetings would expose partners to new information, approaches, technologies and opportunities, and might generate ideas for new synergies and cooperation. Joint fundraising on behalf of the ABI partnership as a whole was seen as necessary to support the 'five Cs' functions, with an emphasis usually on communication and information sharing, rather than actual operational work on the ground. The single, and major exception to this was the strong support suggested by many partners for joint ABI fundraising and operational work on alien clearing – both for strategic coordination, planning and monitoring; and for continuing to access national government funding from DFFE's Natural Resource Management programme (see further discussion below).

ABI should catalyse public-private-civil society partnerships

One of the issues discussed with ABI partners in the individual meetings was the issue of how the ABI partnership relates to government, in particular local government. The Overberg District Municipality, and the two local municipalities into which the majority of ABI's partners have historically fallen – Overstrand Local Municipality and Cape Agulhas Local Municipality, are ABI partners and are actively involved with and supportive of ABI's work. In discussions, some partners highlighted the importance of bringing ABI into a direct relationship with the Overberg District Municipality, seeing it as a vehicle for helping local government to carry out its environmental mandate, in a similar manner to that in which the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association helps local government to carry out its mandate (concurrent with provincial and national government) for managing fire.

The subject of local government's environmental mandate is a complex one, subject to much contesting interpretation and legal debate, given the vast array of legal instruments involved and the overlapping mandates of local, provincial and national government on many functions. Although local government is obliged to create a heathy environment for its citizens, and can get involved in areas such as managing the condition of their estuaries, or participating in catchment management to ensure long-term water supply, in practice municipalities, even the better capacitated ones, tend to focus on environmental functions related to service delivery – provision of drinking water, removal of solid waste etc, without significant involvement with partners addressing wider ecological issues and

landscape management. Nonetheless, the meetings held with the Overberg District Municipality and the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas Local Municipalities indicated a strong support for ABI and a willingness to engage with other ABI partners on landscape management issues, both on the ground, and at provincial level in the framework of the Joint District Approach of the Western Cape government[10], and guided by the provincial Ecological Infrastructure Investment Framework.

The municipalities also play an important role in managing municipal nature reserves, and in land use planning, guided by the municipal Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs) which give spatial expression to the Integrated Development Plans. In some instances there are issues of contention between environmental NGOs and government agencies, for example, on the Hermanus by-pass road planned by the Overstrand Local Municipality that would remove conservation land in the Fernkloof Nature Reserve, with the NGO Whale Coast Conservation campaigning to prevent this.

At provincial level, several ABI NGO partners have reported non-compliance with environmental legislation, for example, illegal actions by Overberg landowners who plough natural veld without a permit – causing loss of intact natural habitat with highly threatened Renosterveld and Elim Ferricrete Fynbos. Such reports have often met with a poor response by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) who lack compliance monitoring and enforcement capacity to deal with a range of transgressions of environmental legislation, including illegal developments, degradation of watercourses, pollution of air, water and soil as well as non-compliance with conditions of environmental permits and authorisations.

Discussions with the three municipalities most directly engaged with ABI, combined with a review of their Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), indicate a limited engagement by the municipalities in areas of core concern to ABI, with the exception of alien clearing. Control and management of alien vegetation must by law be carried out on all municipal property, and is seen by both Councillors and municipal officials as important for local economic development and employment creation. The four local municipalities (Overstrand, Agulhas, Theewaterskloof, Swellendam) receive annual allocations from national government through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Community Work Programme (CWP).

The Overberg District Municipality has acknowledged the need for a coordinated approach between alien vegetation clearing and fire management across the District, and this is reflected in the 2020-21 Integrated Development Plan (IDP). In 2019 the Environmental Management Services and Emergency Services departments called a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss the proposal for a coordinated approach led by ODM, ABI and the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association (goFPA). The initiative was not pursued, but it is significant that the municipality recognised that “Several pressures currently experienced within the Overberg region, such as intense wildfires, water scarcity, depleting water quality, unemployment and biodiversity degradation, can be addressed through effective alien vegetation management”.

Overall, the feeling from most partners is that it is important for ABI to remain independent from government, and to see its role as catalysing three-way partnerships – involving the public sector, the private sectors and civil society. However, there is also general agreement that it is important for ABI’s

[10] Cabinet endorsed the Joint District Approach as a Western Cape approach in line with the National District Development Model. Province-wide consultation on institutionalisation of Joint District Approach resulted in five district interface teams being constituted comprising national, provincial, and local senior officials.

work to be consciously and explicitly aligned with the relevant policies at all three levels of government – particularly the district and local municipalities' IDPs and SDFs, and key provincial policies such as the Western Cape Ecological Investment Framework (EIIF)[11]. The EIIF sets out opportunities for restoration of ecological infrastructure through investment strategies focusing on collaboratively funded interventions, many of which can be directly addressed through ABI. EIIF priorities for restoration are: Control of Alien Invasive Species and fuel load reduction via Management Unit Control Plans, General ecosystem rehabilitation, Protection and rehabilitation of rivers, wetlands & estuaries, Conservation Agriculture, Integrated Fire Management, as well as indirect mechanisms such as improved awareness; better monitoring and evaluation; and better planning. Another important Provincial programme in which ABI Partners have engaged to a certain extent is the one under the Department of Agriculture known as the Smart Agriculture for Climate Resilience (SmartAgri) project[12], launched in August 2014. Under the leadership of the University of Cape Town's African Climate and Development Initiative, a consortium has developed a provincial climate change response framework and implementation plan for the agricultural sector of the Western Cape. This has potential to serve as a springboard for greater engagement between ABI and the farming sector.

Beyond government, the need for increased engagement of the private sector within the ABI partnership was highlighted by partners in three specific contexts:

- **Expanding buyers and processors of cleared alien biomass**: ABI partner and social enterprise Regenerative Space is leading the way for ABI here, facilitating deals with exporters of firewood who cover the initial costs of alien clearing at a decent wage, and other players are emerging, e.g. processing cleared wood into planks, wood shavings and fuel pellets, as well as lower value mulch and compost. Despite the high cost of accessing, removing and transporting alien biomass in many contexts, there is a growing awareness of untapped potential, and opportunities for small but significant profit margins for locally based small businesses to get involved in supply chains.
- **Wider outreach on sustainable farming**: Until now, landowners have been involved through ABI mostly in biodiversity stewardship and ecosystem management – including the commercial farmers of the Nuwejaars Wetlands Special Management Area, as well as landowners in conservancies whose farms are focused on conservation-compatible activities like wildflower harvesting and ecotourism. In the wider Overberg, the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust has signed 19 easements with landowners who are conserving fragments of Renosterveld. There is a feeling amongst some ABI partners that the time is ripe to start addressing issues of sustainable and regenerative farming more directly, and involving all farmers across the Overberg District, regardless of whether or not they have valuable biodiversity on their land. The SmartAgri project can be of support in this.
- **Funding from corporate water users**: In 2019 discussions were held between ABI and The Nature Conservancy, and a study was completed on the potential for a Greater Overberg Water Fund which would sustain long-term catchment management and alien clearing. The study identified corporates in the agriculture and tourism sectors as a significant potential funding source – through their Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programmes and to help meet their Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) scorecard requirements. Examples of larger corporates

[11] Link to 6-minute EIIF overview video: https://youtu.be/ivR7zKs1Jqk

[12] See www.greenagri.org.za

with dealings in the Overberg are: Checkers, Spar and Pick n Pay, Anheuser-Busch (InBev), Pioneer, Agrico, Bayer, Claas, Rovic & Leers, Falcon, Viking, John Deere, Hilton Tours, Overberg Agri, Sentraal-Suid Koöperatief, Sanlam, Santam, Nedbank, Standard Bank and Moov Fuels. Examples of local tourism corporates are Grootbos Private Nature Reserve; Doornbosch Game Lodge, Arniston Hotel and Spa and various high-end wedding venues. Other potential contributors with a vested interest in water security are a number of vineyards, many of whom are linked to the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative, and a number of craft beer outlets.

The ABI Way: The Five 'Cs'

In 2010, when the Independent Terminal Evaluation of the GEF-funded UNDP-supported CAPE Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) project was undertaken, evaluator Brian Child identified five key processes that should constitute Phase 2, to sustain the momentum. Here are the "Cs" as originally formulated by Child:

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1. **Convene** – maintain and strengthen stakeholder processes, using ABI forums to facilitate integration. Broaden stakeholder forums to include the private sector, and private-sector-type processes;
2. **Collate** – greatly improve collection, collation, interpretation and presentation of data as a means of coordinating development and developing a Common Vision for ABI. This possible Vision is: a large, integratively managed landscape creating value to people and environment through sustainable use of biodiversity. Key data is to describe the biodiversity economy, including income and employment multipliers, employment, the value of public goods and services (water, wildlife, scenery), possibilities for economies of scale, monitoring of ecosystem health, etc.
3. **Conceptualise** – use improved data and experience to conceptualize how the system works, build a development hypothesis, build a vision around this hypothesis, and agree the necessary actions.
4. **Cross-scale communications and learning** – link ABI into learning and policy processes at Provincial and National level to develop a supportive enabling environment for ABI, and to enable ABI to contribute its lessons to national development and conservation.
5. **Capitalise** – obtain funding to maintain stakeholder processes, to improve data collection, and to provide tangible activities around which to build stakeholder processes. There are opportunities where capital investment would generate large added value in the form of public goods. Two important innovations might include: a discretionary capital fund to encourage stakeholders to identify and develop such opportunities; the development of collective action and fee-collection mechanisms to raise financing to deal strategically with issues of public goods and payment for environmental services.

These '5 Cs' are collectively known as the 'ABI Way', and were accepted by the partners in 2011 as a framework for the work of the ABI partnership. This section and the four which follow, consider each of these processes, all still considered important by partners, and provides an update on what people are saying about how they can be taken forward in Phase 3, adjusted where necessary.

ABI Way 1: Convene

A New Institutional Model for ABI?

This section considers the 'Convene' process, originally suggested in the evaluation of the ABI GEF-funded project in 2010, to "*maintain and strengthen stakeholder processes, using ABI forums to facilitate integration. Broaden stakeholder forums to include the private sector, and private-sector-type processes.*"

Updating the ABI Way 1: Convene

It is agreed by all that ABI should **maintain and strengthen stakeholder processes, using ABI forums to facilitate integration.** The regular ABI partner meetings, held two to three times a year in Phase 2 to bring partners and stakeholders together to hear from each other and from interesting speakers related to the four ABI themes, should continue. The phase in which only Zoom meetings were possible during the COVID-19 lockdown meant that fewer meetings were held in the past 18 months, but the attendance of nearly 50 people at the AGM, held face-to-face since it was lockdown Level 1, indicates that people are eager for in-person meetings again.

The idea that ABI should **broaden stakeholder forums to include the private sector, and private-sector-type processes** remains important. Looking back on Phase 2, it can be seen that ABI had significant success in some aspects of private sector engagement and less in others. Around 100 private landowners organized into 9 conservancies[13] were actively engaged in the ABI Alien Clearing Project (coordinated by Flower Valley Conservation Trust as the implementing agency for DEA/DEFF/DFFE[14] on behalf of the ABI partnership, from 2013-2021), making financial contributions to the project and participating in its operational committee. This engagement was particularly strong during the phase in which national government's Landuser Incentive Scheme operated, and before the shift to a more general Working for Water model (see CEG report for full discussion of this shift and its consequences for private landowners' engagement). Beyond this intensive engagement with landowners in the Agulhas Plain, ABI benefitted from the work of the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust in reaching farmers further afield, but the ABI partnership was not able to support this work in an active manner.

Other private sector engagement involved support to emerging farmer partners, for example through the Elim Advisory Group, and to wildflower harvesting packsheds and contractors – through engagement with Cape Flora SA on sustainable harvesting guidelines and with CapeNature on streamlining of permitting processes. There is a general feeling that the wildflower harvesting sector is slowly being replaced by the cultivated sector, with rapidly declining profit margins putting strain on the wild harvesting sector. Nonetheless, it will be important to support ABI partners who are engaged in upskilling the flower picking teams in their supply chains, as well as 'lifestyle farmers', many of whom will continue with wild harvesting as a contribution to covering the costs of managing their farms and alien clearing, and because it is an important source of employment. These

[13] Conservancies falling mainly into the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas local municipalities, and Grootvadersbosch Conservancy in the Swellendam Local Muncipal area.

[14] The national government department was named Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) until 2018, whereafter it became part of the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF), which has recently been renamed the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE).

landowners need support, particularly on ecological burns, as part of ABI's engagement in integrated fire and alien management.

Some ABI partners would like to see a further reaching out to all commercial and emerging farmers across the Overberg District, bringing together the various extension agendas of the provincial Department of Agriculture and its LandCare programme, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, the Breede Gouritz Catchment Management Agency, the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association and CapeNature – integrating approaches to biodiversity conservation, management of freshwater ecosystems, integrated fire management, the shift to conservation farming to protect soil and water resources, and a potential shift to regenerative farming to maximize above- and below-ground carbon sequestration in croplands and rangelands (see section below). On the latter, ABI partners already engaged in the organic agriculture sector provide a channel to stakeholders involved in accessing voluntary carbon market funding for climate-smart agriculture that can demonstrate its contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

A New Institutional Model for ABI?

When this assignment began, discussions with the Green Trust project subcommittee focused on the idea that ABI might need a completely new institutional model. Some of the options explored were as follows, and are shown in the diagram below:

Option 1: ABI continues as a coordinating umbrella only, carrying out no activity of its own.

Option 2: ABI is replaced by an Agulhas Biosphere Reserve, or Overberg Biosphere Reserve, with a Biosphere Reserve Company and Members representing the interests of stakeholders in the Core, Buffer and Transition Zones (assuming a successful nomination process via national government to UNESCO).

Option 3: ABI forms a Not-for-Profit Company and operates as a social enterprise, charging fees for services provided in order to subsidize other activities.

Option 4: ABI is replaced by a Greater Overberg Water Fund, through a partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The geographical scope of the Water Fund would be related to the Kleinriviersberg, Langeberg and Sonderend sub-catchments, so would go beyond the original ABI area to cover large parts of the Overberg.

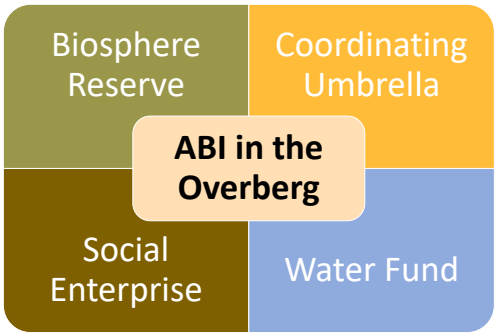


Figure 7: Institutional Options Considered

What has emerged from the discussions with partners and at the AGM is that all of these models have features of interest, but also some drawbacks, as follows:

Option 1: Seeing ABI as a coordinating umbrella only, carrying out no activity of its own, is a bit too narrow. ABI partners would like to take joint activity at times, in areas that are a strategic priority. For the next two years it is safe to say that the overriding priority for ABI partners is the strategic coordination and scaling up of landscape management addressing the interrelated challenges of fire and invasive aliens. This model thus needs to be adapted to allow for light-touch coordination on other areas, and more focused coordination together with fundraising for joint action on aliens and fire.

Option 2: There is much interest amongst ABI partners in the idea of establishing an Overberg Biosphere Reserve, which can work with a wider range of partners over a larger area and utilise this globally recognised brand for marketing and fundraising. Although a working group will be formed to investigate this option, it is likely to take 18 months to 2 years to get established, which means that ABI needs an alternative structure for the medium term.

Option 3: Whilst a Not-for-Profit Company would probably need to be established as the vehicle for governing a new Biosphere Reserve, establishing an NPC now is premature, as the ABI partners are just beginning their investigation into the Biosphere process, costs and benefits. It is possible that a growing number of ABI partners will form their own social enterprises, as full-time businesses which seek to contribute to ABI's objective, ploughing back any profits made into the business, as done by ABI partner Regenerative Space, and this should be supported by the partnership. It is unlikely, however, that such a company could service the wider needs of the entire partnership, and this model was not chosen.

Option 4: The ABI committee held discussions in 2019 and 2020 with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and a number of key stakeholders, including Overberg Agri and the Overberg District Municipality, on the potential to set up a Greater Overberg Water Fund. A grant from TNC made it possible to carry out a screening exercise which showed definite potential for the Water Fund model, which pools investment across multiple public and private water users, to be used to enable restoration of priority sub-catchments and improved land management, in order to enhance and sustain water supply to the growing population of the Overberg (see Annex 5 - screening document).

Greater Overberg Water Fund

The Greater Overberg Region is an intrinsic part of Western Cape Water Supply System and the Palmiet Bot System, connected by the Riviersonderend and Table Mountain Group Aquifer. The proposed Greater Overberg Water Fund is therefore seen as a Basin-approach model for the Berg-Breede Catchments and can pave the way for impact at scale and recognizing the interdependence of systems in future water fund.

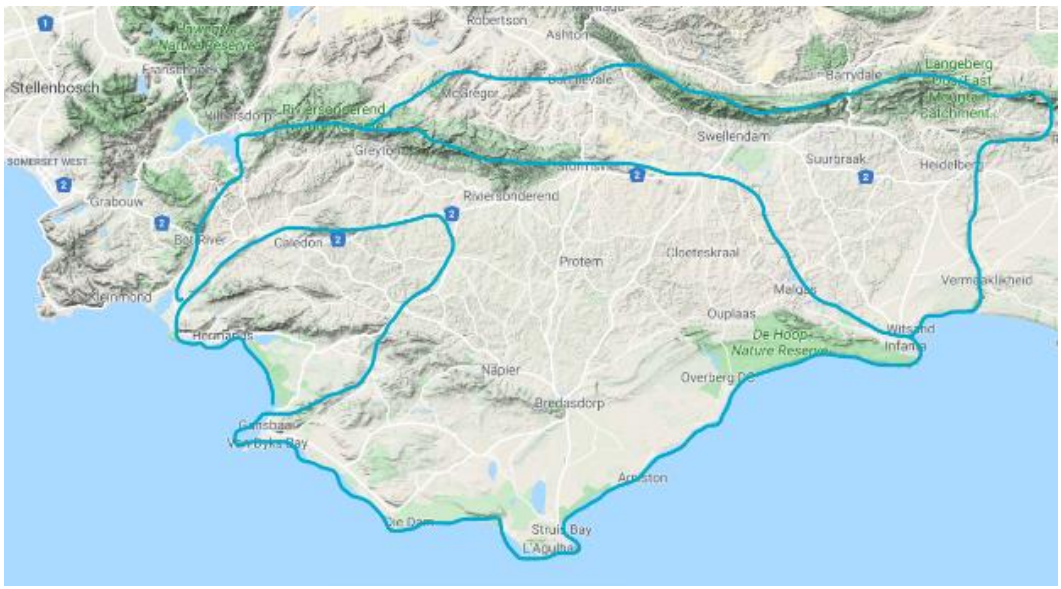


Figure 8: Greater Overberg Water Fund Area

For the purpose of establishing a Water Fund model for the Greater Overberg Region, the region is divided into three catchments or "water factories", viz the Kleinriviersberg, in the West, the Langeberg in the North and Riviersonderend in the East – Figure 8: Greater Overberg Water Fund Area showing the outline of the catchments and the major towns.

The main water users in each of the three areas are a combination of agriculture and urban. The main downstream towns are:

- The Kleinriviersberg – Hermanus (Onrus municipality)
- Langeberg – Swellendam (Swellendam municipality)
- Riviersonderend – Bredasdorp (Agulhas municipality)

The main actions to be coordinated and scaled up through the Water Fund across these sub-catchments, would be restoring catchments by removal of invasive alien plants, restoring wetlands, restoring riparian areas, undertaking erosion control, addressing water quality threats through promoting conservation agricultural principles, and working with farmers and communities to adopt best management practices for abstraction from rivers and groundwater sources.

- 2019 TNC Screening Report

The institutional model of a Water Fund as promoted by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has many elements that are also essential to a future ABI e.g. strong stakeholder involvement, nature-based solutions, solid M&E and a sustainable funding source. A focus on water has not, however, emerged as the best angle for ABI. Consultations with partners indicated that water may not be the way to engage stakeholders to contribute resources for collective efforts at restoring and maintaining ecological infrastructure in the Agulhas Plain and Overberg District. Whilst the spectre of 'Day Zero' in the Cape Town area was a powerful motivator in putting together the Greater Cape Town Water Fund, this consciousness is not as high in the ABI area. This is despite the fact that the Overberg was also affected by the 2016-2018 drought, and is regarded as a water-scarce region, receiving an average of 324 mm of rainfall per year – well below SA's average of 450mm. Total annual rainfall is also highly variable, and is expected to become more so. Sustainability of water supply in the face of a changing

climate[15] and a growing population, is in fact a major challenge facing the Overberg, but public awareness on this seems to have declined over the past three years. Perhaps this could be turned around with the strong drive that would come from a partnership with TNC to establish a Water Fund for the Overberg, but it is also now known that TNC is not in a position to financially support such a project because of funding constraints in the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic. TNC is, however, happy to support a "Partner-driven" Water Fund or similar landscape initiative such as ABI by providing technical input and advice. TNC should therefore be regarded as an important partner for ABI going forward.

In discussions, several ABI partners suggested that, on the Agulhas Coastal Plain, with its continuing severe invasions of water-guzzling alien vegetation, and consequent increases in destructive, unseasonal wildfires, it might be easier to motivate stakeholders around the multiple benefits of managing alien invasives more effectively, with water as one of these benefits. In discussions with the local municipalities, it was felt that local government Councillors, for example, are very much aware of the need for scaled up alien clearing to restore natural ecosystems – with temporary work creation, water availability and natural beauty for tourism being the top-rated benefits from their perspective. It is recommended that the key principle behind the Water Fund model should be applied by ABI going forward – that all those who benefit from the 'water factory' functions of well-maintained catchments, including agricultural, corporate and domestic water users, should contribute on an ongoing basis to their upkeep. This approach can then be applied in a slightly different way, through focusing on the multiple benefits of alien clearing as the call to action for a resource mobilization partnership – for example through an 'ABI Landscape Restoration Fund'.

[15] Climate change models for the Western Cape (2030-2045) predict a general drying trend in the western part of the Province, including the Overberg, combined with more frequent intense rainfall events.

Figure 9: ABI Partners' perception of benefits of landscape restoration through alien clearing

Updating the ABI Way 1: Recommendations

Taking all of the above into account, it is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Convene' function:

1. Maintain the current governance arrangements, with the ABI Committee, elected at the Annual General Meeting by the registered ABI Members, overseeing ABI's activities in terms of the Constitution.
2. Conduct a membership drive to get people in ABI's wider network to sign up as Partners.
3. Register ABI (the existing voluntary association) as a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) with the Department of Social Development, and apply to SARS for Public Benefit Organization (PBO) status.
4. Carry out the mandate from the October 2021 AGM for the ABI Committee to work with partners to establish Working Groups to address strategic priorities (see 'Conceptualise' section).
5. Seek funding to enable a small ABI coordination function starting in early 2022, reporting to the ABI Committee, and taking over this role from the previous team of staff of the Flower Valley Conservation Trust.
6. Work with Flower Valley Conservation Trust on a handover of coordination unit equipment, as well as the systems for partner databases, emailing system, website, social media, accounting, financial reporting, monitoring, mapping and fundraising.
7. Take steps to ensure that the important alien clearing work with support of private landowners and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment can be continued.

Establishing Selected Indicators of Progress

This section considers the 'Collate' process, originally suggested in the evaluation of the ABI GEF-funded project in 2010, to "*greatly improve collection, collation, interpretation and presentation of data as a means of coordinating development and developing a Common Vision for ABI. This possible Vision is: a large, integratively managed landscape creating value to people and environment through sustainable use of biodiversity. Key data is to describe the biodiversity economy, including income and employment multipliers, employment, the value of public goods and services (water, wildlife, scenery), possibilities for economies of scale, monitoring of ecosystem health, etc*."

Updating the ABI Way 2: Collate

A fair amount of data is available that can be used **to describe the biodiversity economy, including income and employment multipliers, employment, the value of public goods and services (water, wildlife, scenery), possibilities for economies of scale, and monitoring of ecosystems.** The challenge for ABI partners is that they are very much focused on carrying out their day-to-day work, business or farming operations, and are not in a position to carry out the kind of ongoing tracking and research needed to develop a comprehensive picture of all of these aspects.

It makes sense, however, that **collection, collation, interpretation and presentation of data** can be **a means of coordinating development and developing a Common Vision.** Following discussions with partners, this process of gathering, interpreting and then presenting back analysed data was seen as an important focus for the ABI partnership – and a service that ABI members can collectively provide to each other. This is particularly the case when individual partners are applying for funding, to show prospective funders how the organization's efforts form part of a greater whole, and are making progress in working towards shared goals. This was confirmed by the ABI online survey (see separate report on the ABI on-line questionnaires) the results of which indicated that ABI "needs to put steps in place to measure the impact of its new strategy, and to demonstrate that working collaboratively has a greater positive impact than individual effort. This will assist with fundraising and leveraging greater traction to address regional and urgent conservation concerns."

Taking all of the above into account, what came out of the discussions was that ABI partners should choose a limited number of thematic focus areas in which this kind of collation of data is undertaken, given limited availability of time and resources – making strategic choices about where to focus in a given period. The section on the 'Conceptualise' process delves into which these thematic focus areas might be for 2022-2023. Each thematic focus area could have a volunteer coordinator, and would be responsible for establishing a working group for information sharing in this area. One of the tasks of the coordinator would be to decide on whether there are particular types of data that would be useful for that working group to commit themselves to tracking over time.

To provide a hypothetical example, a working group on the thematic focus area of Estuaries and Catchments might decide to choose one simple piece of data, that is already being collected through DEA&DP, CapeNature and SANBI – on the state of ecological health of the eight major estuaries in the

ABI / Overberg area[16] once a year – recording whether they are in an Excellent condition (Natural - A), Good (Largely Natural - B), Fair (Modified C or D), or Poor (Degraded E or F). This could be reported across the partnership and in the media, and links made to changes in management practices upstream which have improved or worsened estuarine conditions. Each working group could choose one or two headline indicators like this, which they track, and link wherever possible to activities of the ABI partners. The working group coordinator could also be responsible for tracking important new laws and regulations, policy and strategy documents, circulating links to these documents to a wider group of interested partners, for example on a WhatsApp group, and sending the documents to the ABI coordination unit for uploading on the website, linked to a thematic focus area webpage. For example, the Estuaries and Catchments coordinator might make available the recently published Western Cape Government (2021) *Report on the Implementation of the Western Cape Estuary Management Programme.*

If the ABI partnership gets better at measuring its collective impact, demonstrating the advantages of working collaboratively, it will be in a better position to fundraise and leverage greater traction to address urgent regional conservation concerns. Having clear areas of strategic focus with headline indicators that relate – at least indirectly – to partner activity, that are monitored and reported on annually might also help address the 32% of survey respondents who were uncertain about whether or not ABI has been successful. According to the survey report, this uncertainty related to a perceived "lack of information on how success is measured and which targets are being used. This point was raised in the first evaluation after phase 1 of ABI (Child, 2010), and perhaps is still an ongoing weakness."

Revisiting ABI's Vision

Child's suggested Vision of **a large, integratively managed landscape creating value to people and environment through sustainable use of biodiversity** is valid, but is a bit narrow in its focus on sustainable use, since conservation and restoration of biodiversity are also important. Sustainable use remains important in growing the green economy of the region, including harvesting on a sustainable basis of renewable natural resources such as fynbos wildflowers, honey, medicinal plants and thatching reed. The major emphasis on sustainable harvesting of wildflowers present in Phase 1, and to an extent in Phase 2, seems likely to decline in Phase 3. The sense of a number of partners interviewed was that the GEF investment and the work of Flower Valley Conservation Trust over the years had successfully mainstreamed the principles and techniques of wildflower harvesting into the sector – including full acceptance by the main industry body Cape Flora SA, although of course enforcement remains a serious challenge, with continued illegal picking in parallel with the regulated industry. Work between ABI partners in the industry and CapeNature is now focused on streamlining the issuing of permits and providing training to flower-picking teams. It is proposed that this be picked up in a new thematic focus area on SMME upskilling (see next section).

Child's Vision, as currently in play, could potentially be more accurately described as that of **a large, integratively managed landscape creating value to people and environment through conservation, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity.** If a Biosphere Reserve is to be established in the next

[16] Bot/Kleinmond (on border with Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve), Onrus, Klein, Uilkraals, Ratel, Heuningnes, Klipdriftsfontein, Breede Estuaries, five of which have Estuary Advisory Forums and Estuary Management Plans

few years then ABI partners will need, as part of the consultative process, to conduct a visioning exercise to develop a full vision for the future Biosphere Reserve.

The one area where partners have expressed a commitment to **greatly improve collection, collation, interpretation and presentation of data as a means of coordinating development** is that of integrated landscape management – with a focus on alien clearing, fynbos restoration and fire management. At the AGM it was agreed that the formation of an Aliens & Fire Action Group is a top priority, and the process is starting immediately with a stocktaking workshop to collect and collate data on who is clearing alien vegetation, where and how, with what objectives, through what resources and partnerships. This will hopefully form the starting point for the formation of an action group, since this is one of the two priority joint action areas identified from amongst the seven suggested thematic focus areas (the other being an action group to investigate the establishment of a Biosphere Reserve).

Updating the ABI Way 2: Recommendations

Taking all of the above into account, it is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Collate' function:

1. Working group coordinators of thematic focus areas (see below) to discuss with the group whether there are particular types of data that would be useful for that working group to commit themselves to tracking over time.
2. At a minimum, each working group to select one simple piece of data which can serve as a headline indicator, or a proxy indicator, for progress in the area, e.g. number of small business employees trained over the year through efforts of ABI partners.
3. Results on all thematic focus areas' headline indicators to be reported at the Annual General Meeting and in ABI's own communications, using the website, newsletter, blog and social media.
4. Results on all thematic focus areas' headline indicators to be made available to local newspapers and radio stations through media releases, offering ABI representatives to be interviewed.
5. Working group coordinators to track important new policy and strategy documents, and legal compliance requirements, and circulate links to their WhatsApp group, and send the documents to the ABI coordination for uploading on the website.

ABI Way 3: Conceptualise

Working Groups for Thematic Focus Areas

This section considers the 'Conceptualise' process, originally suggested in the evaluation of the ABI project in 2010, to "use improved data and experience to conceptualize how the system works, build a development hypothesis, build a vision around this hypothesis, and agree the necessary actions."

Updating the ABI Way 3: Conceptualise

Although the ABI partnership has not systematically used **improved data** in the way described above, **experience** of the past decade in collaborating to access national government funding for clearing of alien invasive vegetation (initially around R6 million per year under the Landuser Incentive Scheme, more recently around R4 million per year) has helped to shape a concept of integrated landscape management. In this concept, alien clearing contributes to proactive management of fuel load to reduce fire risk, and prioritization of alien clearing after unplanned fires; fynbos areas are kept productive through ecological burns; soil erosion and flooding are combated through revegetation and river bank stabilization; and wetlands are restored to support maintenance of water quality. The original ABI Phase 2 theme of 'Land Use Planning' was expanded to reflect this, to 'Landscape Planning and Management' (or sometimes 'Integrated Land-use Planning').

Given that ABI is a network of interconnected organizations and individuals, with nodes of common interest, it is possible to identify areas that bring together many partners, and this was done in Phase 2 through the identification of four broad themes: a) Land Use Planning & Management, b) Green Economy, c) Responsible Tourism and d) Environmental Education. In discussions on the way forward for Phase 3, most partners acknowledged the value of all of these four themes and it was not suggested that any of them be discarded. A number of areas were highlighted within these themes, however, and could be considered as a new set of potential Thematic Focus Areas for the next couple of years, as the partnership moves into Phase 3. In these areas, working groups can create space for information sharing, and support regular collection and analysis of data, and present it back to the partners, to enhance their own strategic planning and fundraising. The focus areas mentioned most frequently can be fitted into the framework of the original themes, and illustrated as follows:

Figure 10: Four ABI Themes with seven emerging Thematic Focus Areas

Theme A: Land Use Planning and Management

Thematic Focus Area 1 - Aliens & Fire: This has emerged as the top priority, not just for information sharing and data collection, but also for collective action, and fundraising to make this possible. This makes sense, given that nine of the key conservancy partners have been actively collaborating since 2013 in accessing DFFE Natural Resource Management funding for alien clearing. This collaboration was administered by the staff of Flower Valley Conservation Trust and overseen by an operational committee on which all the conservancies involved were represented. In discussion with ABI partners it was felt that there was excellent coordination around the mammoth task of accessing, spending and reporting on the NRM funding, with many challenges posed by the government's way of operating (see CEG report). But these demands led to an almost exclusive focus on this aspect of alien clearing in the Overberg.

What was missing was the wider coordination of this NRM and private landowner funding with other major sources of alien clearing funding being spent in the Overberg – including LandCare funding from the Department of Agriculture to private landowners and emerging farmers, significant independent investment by private landowners, and major national Expanded Public Works Programme funding from DFFE spent through SANParks in and around the Agulhas National Park. A working group for strategic coordination of aliens and fire across this wider set of role-players (see section below), that could also allow for scaling up and a 20-year strategy, was mooted as early as 2015 through a series of Agulhas Plain and Southern Cape aliens and fire stakeholder workshops, but never materialised in a consistent and organized form. This coordination should ideally happen three to four times a year, to enable adaptive management.

Thematic Focus Area 2 - Biodiversity Stewardship: This continues to be a big focus of work for many ABI partners, both conservation agencies and landowners, providing a cost-effective model for ensuring that privately owned areas with high biodiversity value receive secure conservation status and are linked to a network of other conservation areas in the landscape. CapeNature plays a lead role, forging agreements with private and communal landowners whereby the owners undertake to protect and manage their properties, especially valuable fynbos areas, according to sound conservation management principles. In exchange, CapeNature undertakes to provide advice, management plans and assistance in planning invasive alien species clearing and fire management schedules. Increasingly, stewardship extension and support is also being carried out by conservation NGOs such as the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust, the Fynbos Trust, Grootbos Foundation and others.

Although much valuable work is being carried out by a range of ABI partners there is little systematic coordination and information sharing, or tracking of progress against wider landscape and region-scale plans, such as CapeNature's stewardship corridors, or the Western Cape Provincial Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. ABI partners agree there is a need to come together at least once a year to take stock of progress against established plans, discuss planned objectives for the next period, and share lessons learnt. One option would be for the ABI partners to collaborate to report on some headline indicators of land use and conservation for the Overberg District (or smaller ABI domain) – by for example, tracking how many hectares changed each year from: a) natural/alien-infested to farmland, b) alien-infested to restored natural, and c) unprotected natural to protected natural areas.

Thematic Focus Area 3 - Conservation Agriculture: This is part of daily practice for many ABI partners – to apply or promote best practice sustainability principles in farming, as well as in managing natural veld. Various streams of practice are involved, including organic farming, sustainable agriculture, conservation farming emphasizing soil and water conservation, agro-ecology, and regenerative

farming keeping maximum nutrients, water and organic matter in the soil. With climate change bringing increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, and the potential for more droughts as well as floods caused by intense rainfall events, climate resilient agriculture has also become important, with concepts like climate smart farming incorporating both adaptation to these impacts and contributions to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through farming practices that store more carbon[17]. Many of these good practices, with their various labels and buzzwords have similar features, and have been the focus of growing global discussion and innovation.

What is new in ABI is an increasing desire by some partners to bring together the agendas of integrated landscape management, driven initially by biodiversity conservation goals (the main focus of state and non-state conservation actors), with a conservation-minded approach to agriculture (the focus of the provincial government's LandCare[18] and SmartAgri programmes, Overberg Agri, and the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO)). This integrated approach is already the policy of the provincial Department of Agriculture in principle, and makes sense, since farm management needs to be done holistically – for example, management of on-farm freshwater resources, such as wetlands, springs and riparian zones, affects both crops and natural fynbos on the farm, as well as downstream ecosystems. Several ABI partners have expressed an interest in coming together to share their own experiences, as well as information from this burgeoning global field of sustainable and regenerative agriculture. If a Biosphere Reserve option is pursued, this will become an important focus of activity for the Biosphere Company and Members, as part of efforts in the Transition Zone to promote sustainable resource management practices. In the interim, a Conservation Agriculture working group can start to conceptualise this process, as well as share information and experiences.

Thematic Focus Area 4 - Estuaries and Catchments: Management of freshwater ecosystems has always been important for ABI, seen most powerfully in the flagship Nuwejaars Wetlands Special Management Area, where 25 landowners and the community of Elim have come together to manage their 45,600 hectare landscape of mixed farming and natural areas, including work to restore the Nuwejaars River and its sensitive peat wetland system to a pristine condition. The rivers of the ABI domain mostly flow from the Napier Mountains down to the sea, and together with the system of lakes and wetlands are important for providing surface water and also feeding the Table Mountain Group Aquifer, which extends under the low-lying Agulhas Plain. The Breede River and its tributary Riviersonderend flow from the Boland and Groot Winterhoek Mountains across the Winelands District and northern half of the Overberg District respectively, to the sea at the Breede River Mouth. The health of this estuary, and of De Hoop Vlei where the Sout River empties, are very much affected by upstream farming practices in the Overberg wheat-belt. The estuaries of Bot, Onrus, Klein, Uilkraals, Ratel and Heuningrivier (fed by Nuwejaars and Kars) river systems tend to be in better condition but are also affected by upstream erosion and pollution by fertilizers.

Towns along the Overberg coastline are susceptible to huge pressure on natural ecosystems from expanding housing and infrastructure, and inadequately planned sewage systems and groundwater

[17] The Western Cape provincial Departments of Agriculture and of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning have together launched a climate change response plan called Smart Agri.

[18] Department of Agriculture promotes minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover (cover crops) and crop rotation. Some Proactive extension work happens through the LandCare and Farmer Support divisions, but tends to be carried out by engineering technicians rather than agronomists or agro-ecologists. Overberg Agri promotes minimum tillage, stubble retention and crop rotation.

extraction, and marine species are threatened by overfishing and poaching, as well as climate change impacts on ocean temperature and acidity. Potential exists, under the CapeNature division of Marine and Coasts, for interested ABI partners to come together once a year to take stock of the results of monitoring – by partners like CapeNature, SANBI, SANParks, Dyer Island Conservation Trust, Whale Coast Conservation and the South African Shark Conservancy – of the state of estuarine and coastal ecosystems. Such a grouping could discuss how to link with other ABI working groups addressing the upstream land and freshwater management practices that influence these downstream ecosystems.

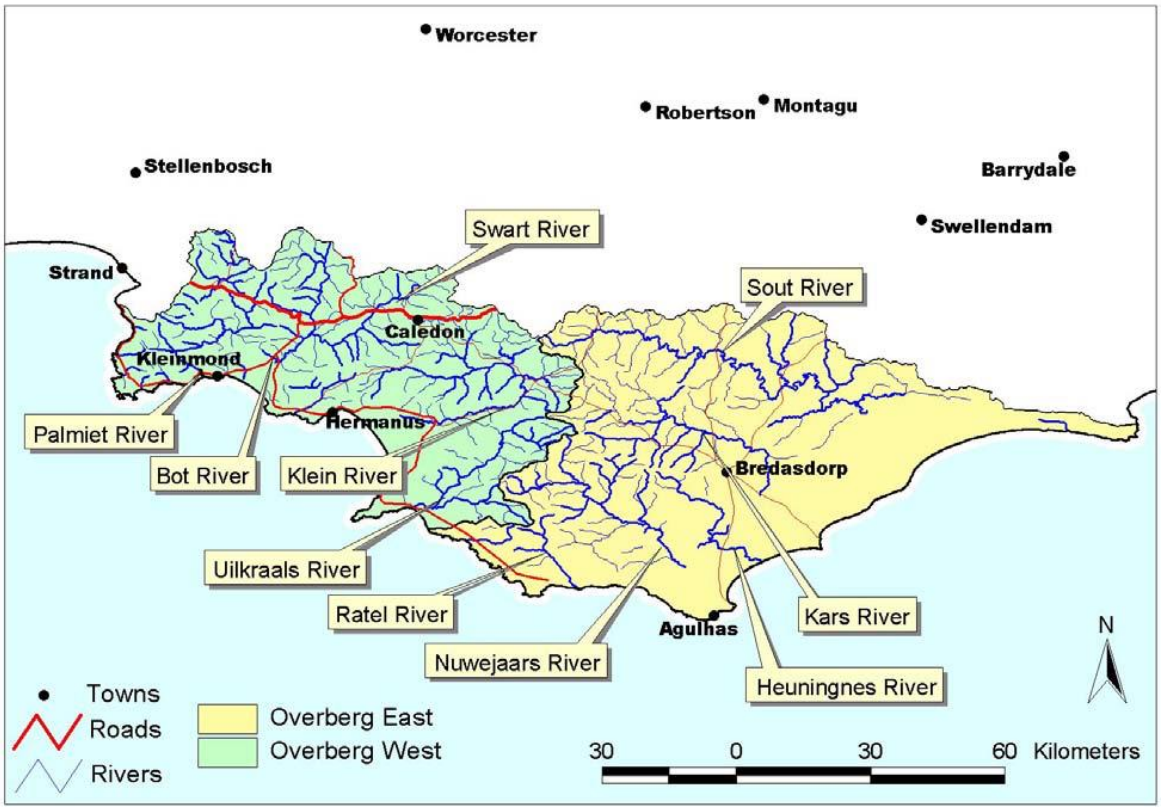


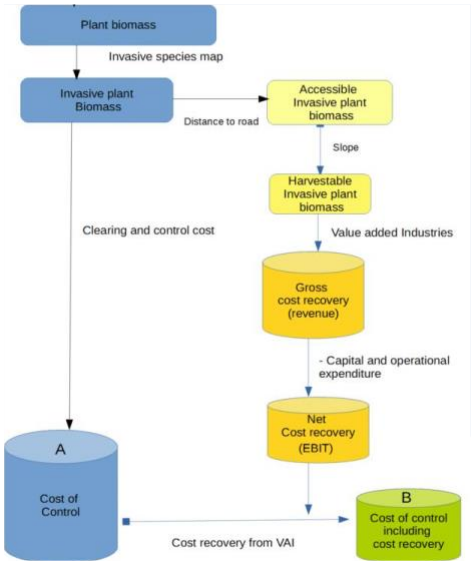
Figure 11: Rivers of the Southern Overberg area

Theme B: Green Economy

Thematic Focus Area 5 - Biomass Value Addition: The original Green Economy theme remains important for ABI in its full breadth, and the ABI business survey included small businesses offering a range of services that they identified as linked to the green economy, namely Alien clearing, Livestock farming, Construction, Woodcutting, Fynbos harvesting, Fire management, Restoration and rehabilitation, Cultivation, Training, Environmental Education, Nature Guiding, Fynbos Honey, Food production, Industrial cleaning, Managing illegal dumping sites and Thatching. Seen from a wider perspective, the Overberg region has potential to expand and innovate in green, blue and nature-related economic activities such as: ecotourism and nature-based tourism; recycling and circular economy industries; renewable energy from wind, solar and biogas; sustainable harvesting of indigenous species as cut-flowers, honeybush tea, essential oils, medicinal ingredients and thatch; cultivation of indigenous species; propagation in nurseries, including threatened species for restoration projects; freshwater aquaculture and mariculture, etc. There is potential for ABI learning events and webinars to share information about emerging opportunities in these fields.

The area in which the most interest was expressed by ABI partners in discussions, in the surveys and at the AGM, is that of emerging supply chains for cleared wood and other biomass from alien vegetation, and industries adding value to the biomass by processing it – into firewood, planks, poles, wood shavings, mulch, fertilizer, charcoal briquettes, animal feed and fuel pellets. This has been a significant focus of study and engagement by ABI partners during Phase 2 under the Green Economy theme. Alien biomass value chains have grown substantially in the last few years, with ABI landowner partners who clear aliens increasingly supplying processors, or middlemen who in turn supply processors, and a growing interest from commercial companies in the standing alien biomass of the Agulhas Plain as a valuable resource.

Figure 12a: Potential value added industries from biomass; Figure 12b: Cost recovery from value add industries



Some ABI partners remain sceptical about the value of alien vegetation, especially dense stands of shrubby trees in inaccessible areas which cannot justify the costs of clearing and transporting it[19]. In other parts of the country, however, commercial companies like African Biomass Company and Calore Sustainable Energy are running large operations with a growing customer base. It is an often repeated estimate that the Agulhas Plain has enough biomass to sustain 20 years' worth of local economic activity, though this depends on access and the extent to which the rate of clearing accelerates. Engaging with small business and larger companies to extract maximum value from the biomass can bring down the costs of alien clearing, needed for societal benefit, significantly – as shown in this graphic.

[19] The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) estimates that only 30% of alien biomass in the Agulhas Plain is easily accessible – being on a slope of less than 20 degrees and a distance of less than 200m from a road.

A key player in biomass value addition amongst the ABI partners is the social enterprise Regenerative Space, who are trusted to facilitate deals between landowners and buyers (e.g. firewood exporters). The buyers pay local alien clearing crews a decent wage to do initial clearing of both high- and low-value biomass, whereafter follow-up clearing is done with funding raised by Regenerative Space. New markets are emerging locally, such as Overberg chicken farmers using wood chips to power incubators. With South Africa's carbon tax in place since 2019, there is a growing demand amongst agri-processors, limeworks and other companies, for high quality wood chips and pellets that can be used in their boilers instead of coal. Several ABI partners have expressed the need for upskilling of local alien clearing crews, and support for small business incubation in these biomass value chains – for example in transport, chipping, packing etc. Potential exists for interested ABI partners to come together once or twice a year, with Regenerative Space, to share information about emerging opportunities in the sector; explore potential for collaboration on business partnerships and skills training, and discuss how to link with other ABI working groups focusing on the closely related fields of Aliens & Fire and SMME Upskilling.

Theme C: Environmental Education

Thematic Focus Area 6 - SMME Upskilling: The original Environmental Education theme remains important for ABI partners, including conservation agencies, NGOs and landowners who are involved in education, awareness-raising and nature-experience programmes with schoolchildren and youth[20] – addressing biodiversity and climate change, eco-ranger roles, nature-based careers and related topics. Flower Valley Conservation Trust, which is ending its landscape-wide role at the end of November 2021, is streamlining and focusing its activities on Flower Valley Farm, as part of the Walker Bay Protected Environment[21], and will focus on being a hub for learning and skills training in the area. The aspects of education and skills development area in which the most interest was expressed by ABI partners in discussion, in the surveys and at the AGM, is the need to upskill small businesses.

The report reflecting on the survey conducted with small business concluded that "ABI can play a stronger role in linking current green businesses to markets and enabling more sustainable income streams" and "ABI can build the capacity of small businesses and their workers, by linking them to opportunities, and possible mentorship and learnership programmes run by the ABI partners". This applies to the fifth Thematic Focus Area on biomass value addition, and also the first Thematic Focus Area on alien clearing, since many of the existing small businesses are local contractors and their teams from Bredasdorp, Elim, Spanjardskloof, Napier, Gansbaai and Stanford who are contracted by various ABI partners to carry out alien clearing work. Some ABI partners are engaged in supporting local cooperatives and entrepreneurs to lease municipal land for cultivation and other economic activities, and the Elim Opsienersraad supports various local economic development and tourism initiatives.

The proposal for a Thematic Focus Area is to investigate how ABI partners can better support these emerging small businesses, in particular the small-scale landscape contractors and their teams. Such

[20] Previous programmes operating in the area included the provincial Department of Agriculture's Junior LandCare programme and SANParks's Kids in Parks and Junior Ranger programmes.

[21] The Walker Bay Protected Environment was established in terms of an Agreement with the Western Cape Provincial Government, with support to the process from Fauna & Flora International, involving voluntary title deed restrictions on Flower Valley, Grootbos and nine other neighbouring properties, ensuring that they remain committed to conservation in perpetuity.

businesses need help to become registered, equipped, trained as formal businesses, able to engage new clients, access loan finance when they need to, generate a greater volume of work, hire more staff on a regular basis, organize themselves with other similar businesses, and increase their profit margins. At present, according to the small business survey findings, "the majority of small businesses do not reflect a profitable return if current annual income is distributed across a 12-month period. Only 33% of businesses in this survey are able to operate for 9 to 12 months of the year, while the remaining 67% are unemployed for more than 4 months of the year".

The survey shows that work opportunities are available, but that businesses struggle to capitalise on these because of the lack of market access, transport constraints limiting them to teams of 10 people, and the difficulty of taking on more staff when continuous employment cannot be guaranteed. Another contributing factor is the lack of capital investment to enable growth of these small businesses. In terms of skills development needs, respondents highlighted operational, wellbeing and relationship skills, suggesting a need for experiential learning opportunities and structured mentorship programmes for both the business owners and workers. The table below is extracted from the online survey report, highlighting the wide range of skills which small businesses would like to develop.

CRITICAL SKILLS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE OVERBERG

Operational	**Professional**	**Wellbeing**	**Relationships**	**Development**
Marketing skills	Construction	Health and safety	Relationship building	Training
Service delivery	Alien clearing knowledge	First Aid skills	Coordinating people	Skills development
Production management	Natural resource knowledge	Passion	Networks	Mentorship
Bookkeeping	Chainsaw skills	Motivation	Team spirit	Innovative work methods
Planning	Herbicide skills	Willingness	Community connectors	Educational background
Organising	Sustainable harvesting	Strong workers	Diplomacy	
Administration	Essential oil experience	Attitude	Community management	
Multi-task skills	Beekeeping knowledge	Tone	Transparency	
Computer skills	Weather knowledge		Cooperation & teamwork	
Trilingual	Woodcutting skills		Work ethics	
Communication skills	Cleaning skills		Discipline	

ABI partners have expressed interest in exploring ways to collaborate to support small and micro enterprises to: a) organize themselves for empowerment and higher earning potential; b) professionalize their services and achieve endorsement and support from ABI; and c) become multi-skilled in a wide range of operations, in order to ensure all year round employment and avoid the

seasonality of the flower-picking industry and the often stop-start nature of government-funded alien clearing operations. The range of emerging skills mentioned by partners includes: clearing, initial processing and transporting of alien vegetation; further processing and value addition to biomass; introducing biocontrol agents for alien control; combating soil erosion; clearing fire breaks; undertaking controlled burns; rehabilitating wetlands and stabilizing river banks with gabions; planting and watering seedlings for restoration and reforestation; constructing wildlife infrastructure; maintaining fences, gates and river crossings; and monitoring biodiversity.

Grootbos Foundation are exploring the potential to offer a part-time hands-on skills training course for the teams in their own supply chain that would equip them to play these multifaceted roles. Such a course might have wider applicability in the ABI partnership, potentially drawing in new delivery partners in the sphere of skills development – such as Nature Connect (former CTEET), Wortelgat, Routes to Resilience, Boland College, The Circle Group and others. Several ABI partners have expressed interest in coming together once or twice a year to share information about emerging opportunities in the sector, to explore potential for collaboration on business partnerships and skills training, and to discuss how to link with other ABI working groups focusing on the closely related fields of Aliens & Fire and SMME Upskilling.

Theme D: Responsible Tourism

Thematic Focus Area 7 - Biosphere Establishment: ABI partners have come together occasionally to discuss new initiatives in responsible, nature-based tourism, and approaches to marketing the unique biodiversity and landscapes of the region, but this has not been a strong feature of ABI in Phase 2. Setting up an ABI partners working group to investigate establishing a Biosphere Reserve was agreed at the AGM, and was initially grouped under the Responsible Tourism theme, because the biggest support for the idea of a Biosphere Reserve came in the first instance from the ABI Partners who run nature-based tourism establishment and activities. These partners argued strongly that being a Biosphere Reserve would be a major asset for their branding, and could help to attract visitors from all over the world to the Overberg and to establishments that are actively participating in the Biosphere Reserve activities. Consideration was given to whether a similar effect might be achieved through some kind of ABI endorsement, but it was felt that firstly this would be very difficult for ABI to administer, and secondly the brand visibility of ABI is much more limited than the globally recognized Biosphere concept.

As discussions progressed, it became clear that forming a Biosphere Reserve could have a range of additional benefits beyond those relating to tourism, such as: mobilizing efforts for landscape management and conservation, providing a focus for applied research into nature and sustainability topics, stimulating the growth of the green economy, and educating landowners and members of the public to undertake more sustainable production and consumption practices respectively. The thematic focus area of Biosphere Establishment, whilst shown in the diagram under the Responsible Tourism theme for convenience, can actually straddle all four themes.

The minutes of the AGM were sent out with an invitation to join a nascent Biosphere Reserve action group, so this is underway. The group might need to meet at least two to three times per year in order to sustain momentum, and will need an active volunteer coordinator.

Updating the ABI Way 3: Recommendations

Taking all of the above into account, it is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Conceptualise' function:

2. ABI Committee to put out a call for those interested to join a list of proposed working groups covering these seven suggested Thematic Focus Areas, and calling for additional suggestions or alternative ways of grouping these topics as well.

ABI Theme	Proposed Thematic Focus Area Working Group	No. of meetings proposed per year
Land Use Planning & Management	Aliens & Fire	2-3
	Biodiversity Stewardship	1-2
	Conservation Agriculture	1-2
	Estuaries and Catchments	1-2
Green Economy	Biomass Value Addition	1-2
Environmental Education	SMME Upskilling	1-2
Responsible Tourism	Biosphere Establishment	2-3

3. ABI coordination unit to establish Working Groups / Action Groups in the areas in which a sufficient level of interest in participating has been expressed by individuals and organizations.
4. ABI Committee to put out a call identifying the agreed working groups and asking members to indicate where they would like to be part of an information sharing network that will be attached to each group.
5. ABI coordination unit to ask working groups to appoint a Volunteer Coordinator whose job description is proposed to be as follows:
    a. Convene face-to-face meetings, or Zoom if necessary, according to agreed schedule (one to three times a year)
    b. Set up a WhatsApp group for working group members who would like to participate in meetings and be actively involved
    c. Set up a second WhatsApp group for network members who want to receive information
    d. Track important policies and strategies in this area and share them with the network WhatsApp group and the ABI communications function in the coordination unit
    e. Cooperate with the working group to establish and monitor at least one headline indicator for tracking an communicating progress of ABI partners in this area
    f. Provide a short written report on the above to the ABI Committee one month before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

ABI Way 4: Cross-scale communications and learning

Connecting inwards and outwards in focus areas

This section considers the 'Cross-scale communications and learning' process, originally suggested in the evaluation of the ABI GEF-funded project in 2010, to "*link ABI into learning and policy processes at Provincial and National level to develop a supportive enabling environment for ABI, and to enable ABI to contribute its lessons to national development and conservation*".

Updating the ABI Way 4: Cross-scale communications and learning

This process has often been shortened in setting out the 'Five Cs' to 'Communicate', but the original intention was to focus on learning as well as communicating – improving the **enabling environment** for ABI activities by making sure they are well linked in to processes beyond the Agulhas / Overberg areas, particularly **learning and policy processes at Provincial and National level**. This means that ABI **can** both receive knowledge and insights from others and **contribute its lessons to national development and conservation**.

Since ABI is a network of partner organizations and individuals, with connections between partners and nodes of common interest, it is easy to envisage this also as a learning network. In discussion, a few partners highlighted the importance of personal development as part of the process – learning, unlearning and relearning as we are exposed to new ideas and experiences. This has been addressed in Phase 2 through the Environmental Education theme, under which several ABI partners have created multi-faceted learning experiences in nature – such as those involving the Overberg Eco Ranger youths at Sandberg, Fynbos Trust's knowledge exchange for conservationists who meet three times a year to share field experiences, or the work at Flower Valley developing teachers and community practitioners. If a Biosphere Reserve is eventually established, there will be great opportunities for raising consciousness on sustainable living, both through holding wider public awareness campaigns and through creating focused mutual learning spaces for self-reflection and growth.

ABI's own regular partner events throughout Phase 2 have created a strong orientation towards ABI as a learning network, with internal and external speakers sharing knowledge and experience from their work on the ground, studies and research. Partners would like to see these events continue, and draw in an ever-widening circle of speakers and participants, possibly both face-to-face and virtually. In particular, there is an opportunity in Phase 3 to invite speakers to share information about innovative and socially inclusive technologies and new business opportunities related to the green economy, including renewable energy and green hydrogen, and industries adding value to cleared alien biomass. Another area of great interest is understanding the impacts of climate change on the Overberg region on agriculture and disaster risk, and what interventions could increase resilience. Several partners are also interested to learn about opportunities for accessing funding through voluntary carbon markets for regenerative farming, and to receive informed advice that helps distinguish between grandiose promises and real potential.

ABI can also be built as a learning network through a conscious use of the Working Groups in Thematic Focus Areas for this purpose. The ABI Committee and coordination unit regularly receive news, policy updates, and workshop invitations from partners within and beyond the ABI domain, including for

example, the Breede Gouritz Catchment Management Agency, the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association, WWF-South Africa, the Western Cape DEA&DP, SANBI and the CAPE partnership with its biannual Landscape Initiatives Knowledge Exchange. Such information should be channelled to the relevant working group through its coordinator, who can distribute electronic links to the related documents online through a WhatsApp network attached to the group. Policies, strategies, laws and regulations can also be uploaded to the website, which can be updated to include a page for each Thematic Focal Area – serving as a 'one-stop shop' for people needing information. Selecting a headline indicator of progress for each working group and agreeing to collect and share data on an annual basis will also promote this outwardly-orientated approach to learning and communication. The Committee and coordination unit can work to ensure that opportunities to attend events are spread amongst many people – to avoid becoming burdensome on partner organizations, and to maximize exposure of individuals to wider processes and their own capacity development.

Communications and learning inside the partnership also remain important in Phase 3. The online survey confirmed that ABI institutional partners appreciate receiving newsletters and emails, and rely on these to a large extent to know what is going on in the partnership. Small businesses who use electronic media less extensively are not as aware of ABI partner activities, and tend to rely heavily on external media such as radio and newspapers. Feedback received from the online survey confirms that institutional respondents would like ABI to provide a broader communications function that is not only ABI-specific, but also includes information on proposed developments expected to have environmental impacts, as well as new government legislation, policies and strategies. There is particular interest from both instituitonal and business respondents in receiving real-time information on opportunities related to jobs, contracts, grants, loans, awards and competitions, as well as information on events open to the public such as webinars and expos.

Depending on the resources available to continue a communications function like that ably played by the company LoveGreen over the past few years (see Annex 6 with current communications plan), it is thus desirable for this function to:

- Support the holding of regular partners' learning events and showcase the results
- Update the ABI website to include a page for each Thematic Focal Area, and cooperate with volunteer coordinators of working groups to gather and upload key documents
- Use the ABI digital platforms (website, social media and emailers) and media opportunities to tell inspiring stories, and to profile partners to each other and to a wider audience
- Consider the website, social media or a purpose-designed app to create a 'virtual marketplace' for ABI partners to advertise and access services, jobs and tenders etc
- Use mainstream media and own social media to publicise the results of the annual progress assessment by each working group of its headline indicator.

Updating the ABI Way 4: Recommendations

Taking all of the above into account, it is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Cross-scale communications and learning' function:

1. ABI Committee to ensure that the partnership is represented in engagements with partners at district level
2. ABI Committee to continue fundraising to support a coordination unit which will ideally include in-house or external capacity for communications and learning

3. Coordination unit to hire and brief communications capacity, once resources are available
4. ABI Committee to decide on core communications and learning functions, e.g.
    a. Support the holding of regular partners' learning events and showcase the results
    b. Update the ABI website to include a page for each Thematic Focal Area, and cooperate with volunteer coordinators of working groups to gather and upload key documents
    c. Use the ABI digital platforms (website, social media and emailers) and media opportunities to tell inspiring stories, and to profile partners to each other and to a wider audience
    d. Use social media to share news and advertise events
    e. Consider the website, social media or a purpose-designed app to create a 'virtual marketplace' for ABI partners to advertise and access services, jobs and tenders etc
    f. Use mainstream media and own social media to publicise the results of the annual progress assessment by each working group of its headline indicator.
5. Include sustainability learning[22] as part of the brief of the working group investigating the establishment of a Biosphere Reserve.

Figure 13: Example of ABI social media showcasing partners

[22] Sustainability learning – co-creating new knowledge and sharing learning experiences in a way that is self-reflective, purposeful, and adaptable to the changing environment.

ABI Way 5: Capitalise

New financial models for priority joint actions

This section considers the 'Capitalise' process, originally suggested in the evaluation of the ABI GEF-funded project in 2010, to "*obtain funding to maintain stakeholder processes, to improve data collection, and to provide tangible activities around which to build stakeholder processes. There are opportunities where capital investment would generate large added value in the form of public goods. Two important innovations might include: a discretionary capital fund to encourage stakeholders to identify and develop such opportunities; the development of collective action and fee-collection mechanisms to raise financing to deal strategically with issues of public goods and payment for environmental services*".

Updating the ABI Way 5: Capitalise

Much thought and effort have gone into trying to ensure financial sustainability – for the important individual work programmes of ABI partner organizations, for coordination between them to keep ABI alive as a network and landscape initiative, and for undertaking joint action in limited areas where this is agreed as being desirable. The selection of two Priority Joint Actions – Aliens & Fire and Establishing a Biosphere Reserve means that it is these two areas that will **provide tangible activities around which to build stakeholder processes**. Fundraising will also need to be undertaken by the ABI Committee for the coordination function, which covers the point to **obtain funding to maintain stakeholder processes, to improve data collection.** The idea of a **discretionary capital fund** is attractive, but a capital fund in which only the interest is spent requires a large initial endowment, and no such large-scale funding sources are immediately apparent.

The idea of a **fee-collection mechanism** was also raised in the online survey of institutions, in which several respondents mentioned ABI partnership fees as a potential source of revenue. A drawback is that the fees would have to be quite high to generate a significant revenue stream. If the number of partners were doubled from 50 to 100, and they each paid R5,000 per year, the total would be R500,000 per year, which could make a significant contribution to coordination costs. The trouble is that many ABI partners already have to pay conservancy fees, Fire Protection Association fees, and other charges. It seems unlikely that there would be enthusiasm for making a regular contribution to ABI at this scale, given that the benefits of participation are not as concrete as, for example, being able to call on fire suppression services. This is something for the ABI Committee to consider as part of their fundraising strategy, but for now it is not highlighted as a key avenue to pursue.

Generally ABI partners have raised their own funds since 2010 for initiatives that contribute to ABI's overall objective to "foster biodiversity through sustainable and integrated socio-cultural, economic and environmental development in the Overberg". In three areas, joint fundraising was undertaken: some funding for the co-ordination and secretariat, the ABI Alien Clearing Programme with nine conservancies which include 100 landowners, and the ABI Small Grants programme with support from the Table Mountain Fund. In discussions, ABI partners made it clear that any joint fundraising activities undertaken by ABI in Phase 3 should be for the benefit of the partnership as a whole, and carried out in such a way that partners' own individual fundraising activities are not impeded. ABI should also make available to partners on a weekly basis any new information available on opportunities and application deadlines related to jobs, contracts, grants, loans, awards and competitions.

The online survey of institutions generated useful figures on partners' investments in conservation-related work: "The seven institutions with the highest revenue in the ABI area together invest more than R35-million into the broader conservation sector annually. This is comparable to the first phase

of ABI during which $11 784 775 (around R177-million in today's terms) was spent by the partners over six years from 2003-2008 (Child, 2010), which is equivalent to ±R30-million per annum using current exchange rates. The partners in the ABI collective have been able to sustain and even grow investments into the green economy and conservation of biodiversity since the first phase of ABI." The suggestion has been made that this information should be collected on an annual basis, so that the ABI can take stock of partners' own investments, and partners can use this information in their own resource mobilization efforts, since ABI partner investments can in some contexts be seen as co-financing to future investments by the public and private sectors or donors in the region.

Sustainability for Phase 3, 2021-2030

In Phase 3 it is recommended that the ABI Committee put their energies into investigating the following six potential funding avenues, which seem to hold most promise for mobilizing resources to support coordination of the partnership and undertaking of Joint Priority Actions. These proposed funding mechanisms are designed to work together and complement each other:

1. **ABI Landscape Restoration Fund:** The principle applied in the Nature Conservancy's Water Fund model of drawing on water users to provide a sustainable financing source for catchment and landscape management, can be applied in a similar fund using restoration as the 'selling point' rather than water. The thinking from a number of ABI partners was that although water security is a looming challenge for the Overberg and the Agulhas Plain, consciousness is not yet high enough for people to see this as a trigger for donating funds. Alien clearing, on the other hand, is fairly widely known as a provider of multiple benefits (jobs, water and biodiversity are highlighted by Working for Water) and as reducing the risk of unmanageable fires. For some people, the importance of restoration is fairly high in their consciousness in this UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030). The proposal would be to create a revolving fund, which is regularly replenished by an ongoing source of revenue that can be utilized flexibly (see no. 2 below), as well as by once-off or project-based earmarked funds (see no. 6 below).
2. **Municipal rates levy:** Initial discussions have been held with officials on the idea of a levy on municipal rates bills to provide an ongoing revenue stream for alien clearing and landscape management. Discussions were focused on the two local municipalities where the majority of alien clearing is needed – the Overstrand Municipality and the Cape Agulhas Municipality. Any decision on such a matter would be made by the Municipal Councils, and would require engagement with the Municipal Managers and Chief Financial Officers. Hypothetically, if 30,000 ratepayers in the Overstrand Municipality and 10,000 ratepayers in the Cape Agulhas Municipality each contributed R10 per month in the form of levy on their municipal rates bills, this would generate the significant total sum of R4,800,000 per year. This funding would be ringfenced in the ABI Landscape Restoration Fund and would be used to support municipalities in fulfilling their legal obligations to keep municipal land free of alien infestation, to help clear aliens in strategic water source areas that help supply water to the towns of Hermanus, Gansbaai etc, and to support ABI's strategic coordination, planning and monitoring functions on aliens and fire. There is a precedent for such a levy being used in the past in the Overstrand Municipality, to fund the capital costs of a large infrastructure development over a period of some years. In discussions held between ABI, The Nature Conservancy and the Overberg District Municipality in 2019 the principle of such a levy was explored, and indications were positive.
3. **Engagement with corporates:** The Water Fund principle of drawing on water users to provide a sustainable financing source for catchment and landscape management, can also be applied to large enterprises in the agricultural, industrial and tourism sectors, who rely on a regular supply of large volumes of clean water to carry out their business. Businesses should be approached to

make contributions to the ABI Landscape Restoration Fund, potentially through their Corporate Social Investment (CSI) programmes and to help meet their Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) scorecard requirements. Examples of larger corporates with dealings in the Overberg are: Checkers, Spar and Pick n Pay, Anheuser-Busch (InBev), Pioneer, Agrico, Bayer, Claas, Rovic & Leers, Falcon, Viking, John Deere, Hilton Tours, Overberg Agri, Sentraal-Suid Koöperatief, Sanlam, Santam, Nedbank, Standard Bank and Moov Fuels. Examples of local tourism corporates are Grootbos Private Nature Reserve, Doornbosch Game Lodge, Arniston Hotel and Spa and various high-end wedding venues. Other potential contributors with a vested interest in water security are vineyards, some of whom are linked to the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative, and a number of craft beer outlets.

4. **Working for Water:** The ABI Committee is working with the Flower Valley Conservation Trust to ensure that the important alien clearing work with support of private landowners and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment can be continued, for the current three-year cycle of Working for Water funding[23]. Although these funds, which are spent with co-contributing groups of landowners organized into conservancies or farmers' associations, come with a lot of administrative strings attached, they are a valuable source of funds for the ABI partnership's alien clearing programme. Continuing to access these funds collectively will give ABI 'skin in the game' in the wider strategic coordination role for the partnership on aliens and fire management. It is hoped that funding for the next three-year cycle (R19 million in total) will also be secured, to enable this important source of funding and employment to be sustained. If fundraising efforts (see no. 6) are successful, it will hopefully be possible to expand the ABI coordination unit to enable an additional layer of input into this work – to ensure that it is geared towards ecological restoration and fynbos regeneration, that scientific monitoring is carried out, that biomass value addition opportunities are maximised, and that alien clearing crews are supported to increase their skills base.

5. **Presidential Employment Stimulus - Social Employment Fund:** A new initiative launched in November 2021 through the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC), and managed by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), is making funding available to non-state actors to create part-time (16 hours per week) work opportunities over a 9-month period in any field contributing toward the common good, including environmental services. One of the ABI partners, the South African Organic Sector Organisation (SAOSO) is involved in a consortium that is putting together an application to the Social Employment Fund, making up the minimum number of 1,000 participants per application by drawing in a number of small NGOs and CBOs, who will each recruit participants in their local areas. For every 100 people involved, at least R800,000 in wage costs would be coming into the local economy in the Agulhas Plain and wider Overberg District. Some of the work involved will relate to organic and conservation farming, as well as alien clearing and landscape management, and could contribute toward the overall ABI objective. Those ABI partners involved would participate in the Aliens & Fire working group that is addressing strategic coordination of integrated landscape management.

6. **Philanthropic and corporate trusts and foundations:** Over the course of ABI Phase 2, both the ABI partnership and a number of individual partners have benefitted from generous contributions from a number of philanthropic and corporate trusts and foundations, including Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, WWF South Africa, the WWF Nedbank Green Trust, Table Mountain Fund (TMF),

[23] These are funds received by Implementing Agencies originally attached to the Landuser Incentive programme, through the Natural Resource Management branch of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment.

Drakenstein Trust and the Millennium Trust – who between them have supported projects and programmes on climate change resilience, invasive plant control, natural resource management, water security and social upliftment. As discussed earlier in this report, any approaches by the ABI Committee to these donors need to be undertaken carefully, so as to add value to rather than competing with applications being made to the same donors by individual partners. Fundraising on behalf of the ABI partnership should be limited to the two identified Priority Joint Actions – Aliens & Fire and Establishing a Biosphere Reserve, as well as the coordination function for the partnership and its communications and learning network.

Updating the ABI Way 5: Recommendations

1. ABI coordination unit to track investments made towards conservation and landscape management across the region on an annual basis through a mini-survey
2. Working group investigating establishing a Biosphere Reserve to bring to the ABI Committee's attention if/when it reaches that point: a) the need to seek financial support for a consultant to prepare the nomination documents, and b) the need to register a Non-Profit Company with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), as the basis for a future Biosphere Reserve Company
3. Short-term actions are suggested below, to move forward in each of the identified funding avenues, for the ABI committee / coordination unit to take action as follows:
    a. **ABI Landscape Restoration Fund**: Complete the process of registering the ABI voluntary association as an NPO, and applying for PBO status, with a separate bank account which could be used to receive contributions to a special-purpose fund for landscape restoration, including strategic coordination of alien and fire management.
    b. **Municipal rates levy:** Prepare a presentation of the case for a municipal rates levy for landscape restoration, which can be presented as soon as possible to the new Councils and budget committees of the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas Local Municipalities, as well as the Overberg District Municipality.
    c. **Engagement with corporates:** Prepare a business case for corporate contributions to a special fund for landscape restoration, which can be presented to companies as needed, demonstrating the social, environmental and business returns.
    d. **Working for Water:** Prioritise steps to ensure that the important alien clearing work with support of private landowners and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment can be continued in the current cycle.
    e. **Presidential Employment Stimulus - Social Employment Fund:** Share information with small businesses and NGOs in the ABI network on any opportunities arising from consortia seeking to access the Fund.
    f. **Philanthropic and corporate trusts and foundations:** Approach Drakenstein Trust and the Millennium Trust to discuss ABI partnership taking on responsibility for strategic coordination of aliens and fire management, as well as the NRM contract, and explore opportunities for support; hold discussions with Freshwater Ecosystems group in WWF on potential to put in an application for support in Phase 3 from WWF / WWF Nedbank Green Trust.

Priority Joint Action 1:

Scale up Ecological Restoration on the Agulhas Plain

Discussions with ABI partners and the online survey have indicated extensive engagement by ABI partners on integrated land use planning and management, in particular on ecological restoration through alien clearing, using mechanical clearing, herbicides and biocontrol agents. Alien invasive plants are being removed on an ongoing basis from various areas across the Overberg, with initial clearing and follow-up using funds from a number of different sources, both public and private.

The Working for Water programme, with funding channelled through the Flower Valley Conservation Trust on behalf of ABI, covers approximately 10,000 ha of private land annually in nine conservancies, with significant financial contributions by landowners. Alien clearing, as well as some limited work in the restoration of wetlands and riverine areas, is carried out by the Provincial Department of Agriculture (LandCare), Working for Wetlands, CapeNature, SANParks, municipalities, private sector and landowners, conservancies, NGOs and even some companies like Anheuser-Busch (InBev). The Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association, together with its members (60% of the farming landowners in the Overberg) remove alien invasive plants and restore wetlands on an ongoing basis. SANBI runs a programme for the early detection of alien invaders, taking the more proactive approach. Alien clearing and fynbos restoration are also carried out inside the network of protected areas, many of which are in the catchments and wetland areas and are vital for keeping ecosystems healthy and functioning. These include nature reserves (private and public), stewardship sites and conservancies. Lead organizations include SANParks, CapeNature, NGOs such as the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation Trust and the Grootbos Foundation, and private landowners such as the 26 members of the 45,600ha private Nuwejaars Wetlands Special Management Area.

Following the emergence of integrated alien and fire management as the top priority for joint action by ABI partners, it is suggested that this be one of two Thematic Focus Areas that are prioritized for proactive coordination, strategic planning and resource mobilization (the other being investigating establishing a Biosphere Reserve). The process of forming a Fire & Aliens action group has already begun, with the holding of a stocktaking workshop in late November 2021. The reasons for including fire and aliens together relate to the highly connected nature of these two phenomena in determining landscape condition and ecological health:

- Fire is an essential ecosystem process in fynbos and renosterveld, and regular prescribed burns (every 9-17 years, depending on the vegetation type) are needed to stimulate regrowth and renewal – important for ecosystem health, and also for tourism and the wildflower industry.
- Unplanned wildfires (becoming more frequent with climate change) often lead to massive resprouting of alien vegetation after the fire, necessitating follow-up alien clearing, requiring adaptive management so that resources can be redirected to urgent unanticipated needs.
- Carefully controlled fire in the right environmental conditions, avoiding risk of spreading and damaging property, can be used as a means of alien eradication, though proper follow-up is always required (as it is for ecological burns).
- Proactive clearing of dense stands of woody invasive trees can reduce fuel load, so that if a fire does come into the area it does not burn with such intensity, damaging soils and risking rapid further spread.

The need for strategic coordination and scaling up of alien clearing efforts, in concert with fire management is not new in ABI, and was discussed in 2015 in a multi-stakeholder workshop enabled through the UNDP-GEF Fynbos Fire project to explore the feasibility of integrating fire and alien

vegetation management in the Agulhas Plain (as well as a parallel workshop for the Southern Cape). The workshop highlighted the following ongoing challenges that result in ineffective fire and alien vegetation management in the Agulhas Plain (and are similar for most parts of SA):

- Although attempts to address the threats have been implemented for many years (> 30 years), the impacts of these efforts remain questionable due to the lack of focus, coordination, prioritization and continuity.
- The complexity of multiple organizations with overlapping mandates, working largely in silos, means at best we miss opportunities to support each other; at worst, we sometimes work at cross purposes, or fail to fill obvious gaps, e.g. reprioritizing resources to do follow-up alien clearing after a major wildfire.
- There is an absence of long-term funding, and an over-reliance on government to address the problem, with untapped opportunities for private sector engagement on biomass value addition.
- The underlying ecological logic is not always consistent, especially where public funds are used that have primarily social objectives.
- Alien clearing attempts are often fragmented, frequently at a very local scale, and sometimes not completed due to a lack of "ownership".
- Lack of intervening at the appropriate scale – local level attempts to clear invasive plants, prevent soil erosion and restore wetlands happen in the absence of a big-picture and long-term view.
- There is a lack of good information with updated mapping and monitoring, on which to base coordinated efforts.

Although the national map of alien invasive vegetation has not been updated since 2010, the Agulhas Plain and some other parts of the Overberg District remain heavily infested, as confirmed by recent studies estimating how these invasions affect water availability.

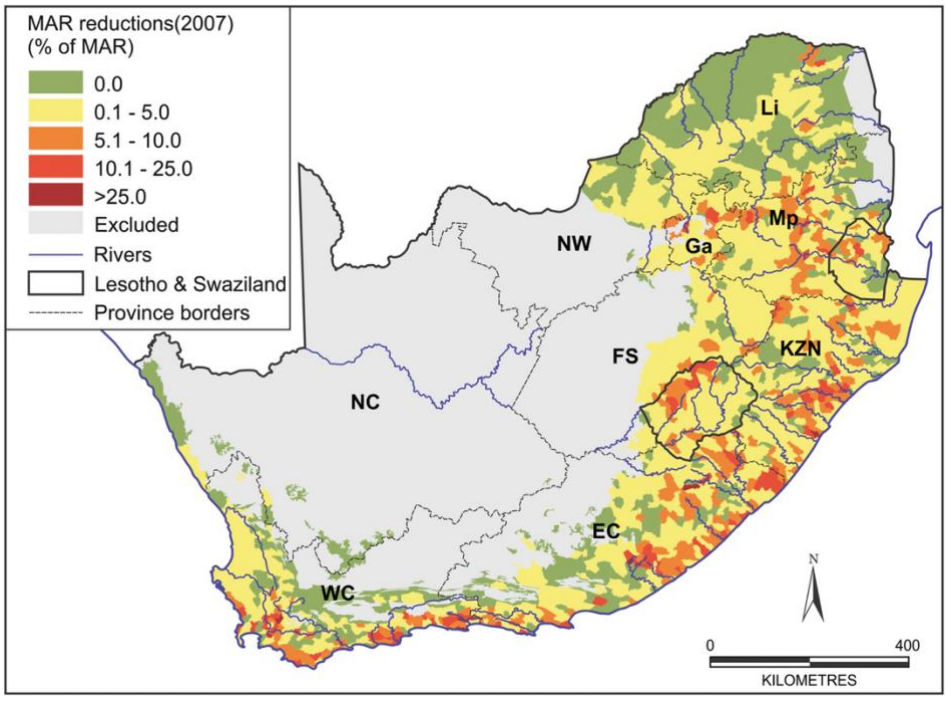


Figure 14: Impact of Plant Invasions on Terrestrial Water Flows in South Africa (Le Maitre et al., 2020)

The main recommendation of the 2015 workshop to address these ongoing challenges was the formation of "a 'standing work group' consisting of all the key role-players in fire, aliens and water

management (landowners, conservation agencies, members of the FPA and of the CMA), relevant national departments responsible for policy and law enforcement (DEA, DAFF, Public Works, Water Affairs etc.), private landowners organisations, local and district municipalities; Eskom, Transnet, SANRAL, EPWP programmes including Working on Fire, Working for Water etc."

This group "would need to use databases from e.g. ABI, Cape Nature, SANParks, CSIR, SANBI (aliens), FPAs (fires) and Working for Water to bring science to this process and put together an integrated landscape plan for the whole area. Groups felt that we need priorities i.e. we need to know where we are going to work to get the best bang for the buck. We need a full spatial plan to identify where we are going to operate - not only at farm level, but at landscape level, in a coordinated and integrated way. The plan must identify the priority catchment areas, priority wetlands, systems, corridors (source to sea) etc. The plan should establish (at the overall level) the standards that will inform work of the partners. The plan should also identify the resources and research needed, M & E and implementation planning. Then draw up an annual plan of objectives (APO). Everyone must have their own plan that flows from there. All agencies will still have a mandate to implement their own organisation's work, but now within the framework provided by that integrated plan that all have agreed on. The key to success is effective partnerships working in a coordinated and integrated way."

The workshop felt that one organization should host this coordination function, but could not decide between ABI, the Greater Overberg Fire Protection Association and the Breede Gouritz Catchment Management Agency. In the interim, a coordinating structure representing all three organizations was established at a 2015 workshop, but this does not seem to have led to the desired long-term coordination. Three reasons can be identified:

1. The plan may have been overambitious about the degree to which operational planning could be truly integrated – given the very different geographical scales and overlapping boundaries of the key players, as well as differing operational time frames.
2. The plan assumed that the working group could not function without a full-time, paid coordinator, and did not manage to meet regularly in the interim until this could be achieved.
3. The energies of many of the key players went into the Flower Valley-coordinated ABI Alien Clearing Project, with operational meetings needed to guide the clearing on those specific 10,000 hectares per year in the nine conservancies with national DFFE funding.

The latter reason is understandable, given the massive challenges involved in making the DFFE Natural Resource Management funding work, particularly after the 2016 shift from the Landuser Incentive model to the more general Working for Water-type model of Expanded Public Works Programme funding. These challenges are discussed in depth in the report on the recent survey conducted by Contour Environmental Group (included in Green Trust reporting package) of the ABI partners involved in the ABI Alien Clearing Project from 2013 to 2021.

Nonetheless, the NRM funding is only one stream of the state resources coming into the area – the R4 million p.a. from NRM is accompanied by R5 million p.a. from Province through LandCare, as well as large allocations to SANParks for clearing in the Agulhas National Park and its buffer zone, from Working for Water, Working for Wetlands and Working for the Coast. Although these allocations have dropped to around R5 million p.a. in recent years, at the peak a few years ago SANParks was receiving over R20 million p.a., and has a large coordinating team and network of 30 contractors and their crews, contributing significantly to employment in the Cape Agulhas Municipality. Then there are all the many investments being made by landowners to fulfil their own legal obligations, as well as alien clearing work being carried out with funds raised by NGOs. It is clearly necessary to coordinate better, to scale

up spending on clearing and follow up directed at ecological restoration, and to track the resources being spent (see section on 'Capitalise').

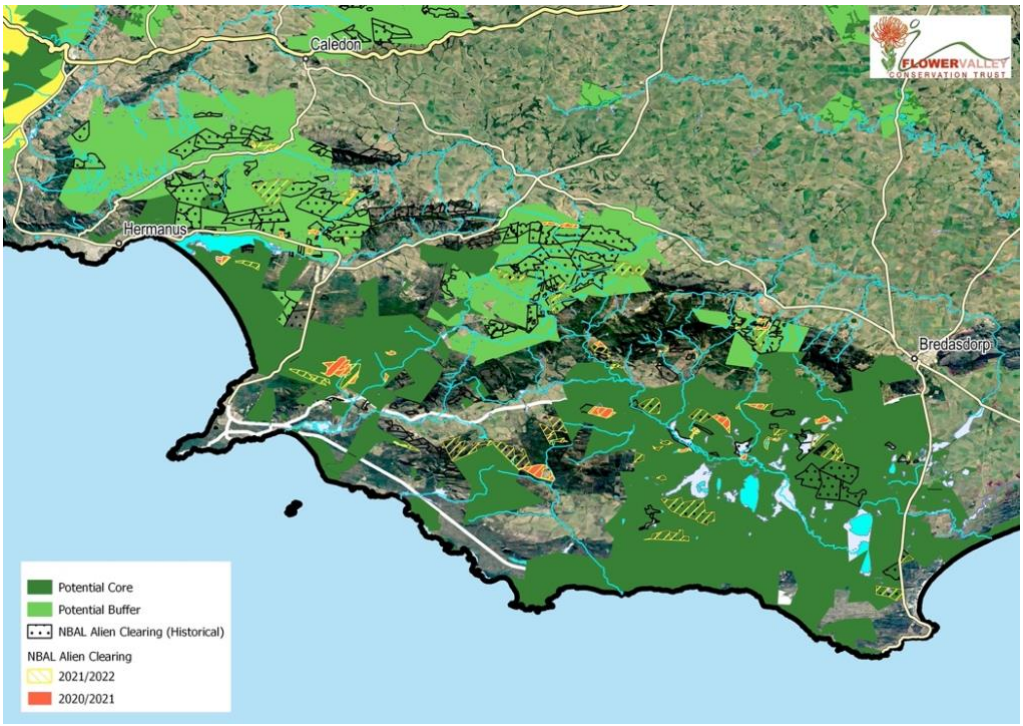


Figure 15: Past and future target areas for alien clearing 2018-2021 through the ABI Alien Clearing Project

The expenditure period for the current cycle of national government funding for alien clearing in partnership with private landowners, through implementing agencies nationwide, has been extended until March 2023 because of delays resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown. As expressed in the CEG report and at the AGM, ABI partners generally feel that it is important to continue to access the national government funds for clearing on private lands, since this is an important source of funding complementing others. As shown by the CEG survey, the temporary work opportunities involved make a significant contribution to livelihoods on the Agulhas Plain – with 130 members of alien clearing crews supporting approximately 850 dependent family members. The report also highlighted the need for ABI partners to cooperate on upskilling of alien clearing teams, and support their extension into other aspects of landscape maintenance, working towards having a pool of multiskilled contractors endorsed by ABI. ABI partners are determined to continue to pursue national government funding, despite the obvious drawbacks involved – including excessive bureaucracy, unrealistic compliance standards for small contractors, delays in disbursement of funds, sudden changes in norms and standards, and major policy shifts occurring without warning (see CEG report).

At the AGM, partners agreed that it would be important to use the results of the CEG survey through the Green Trust project to cooperate with other Implementing Agencies in approaching the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE), with support from WWF's Freshwater Ecosystems Programme, to discuss how the Working for Water programme of support to conservancies can be implemented more efficiently and effectively, with greater ecological impact.

Going forward in Phase 3, ABI's work on **Priority Joint Action 1: Scale up Ecological Restoration on the Agulhas Plain** will thus be twofold:

1. On the one hand ABI will continue to support private landowners in conservancies and other groupings such as farmers' associations, to come together to access national government funding for alien clearing. Additional ABI fundraising from philanthropic and other donors to a potential ABI Landscape Restoration Fund (see Sustainability section) will enable additional planning and monitoring of this work, e.g. to make sure that initial clearing is followed up, and that post-clearing management objectives are set and implemented, including restoration of fynbos and renosterveld wherever possible.
2. On the other hand, ABI will establish an Aliens & Fire Action Group, agree on its terms of reference and appoint a volunteer coordinator, who will be responsible for making sure the group meets face-to-face at least three to four times a year. This will enable the kind of flexible and relatively fast-paced decision-making that is needed to adapt to changing circumstances, such as the detection of a new invasive species, the occurrence of an unplanned veld fire, or the acquisition of major new funding. Holding regular face-to-face meetings, initially without a paid coordination function, will enable this aliens and fire "war-room" approach to become operational, and its evident value can then be used to attract longer-term funding.

Priority Joint Action 2:

Investigate a Biosphere Reserve in Overberg

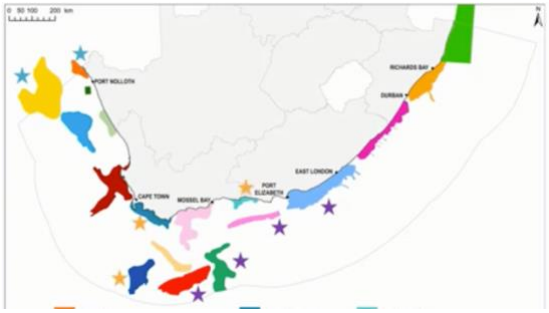
The option of establishing a Biosphere Reserve in the Overberg District was discussed through the Overberg District Municipality as far back as 2003, but there not being major support for this option amongst stakeholders at the time, no concrete action was taken then or subsequently. In the context of planning the way forward for ABI for the next phase, the idea has once again been raised, as one of the institutional options. Through the Green Trust-supported consultancy, discussions were held with 55 people from ABI partner organizations about the way forward, including the option of establishing a Biosphere Reserve in parallel with ABI, and/or to replace ABI in time, once fully established. This route was one chosen by two of the other original CAPE landscape initiatives – the Gouritz Initiative – now the Gouritz Cluster Biosphere Reserve, and the Garden Route Initiative – now the Garden Route Biosphere Reserve. An Overberg Biosphere Reserve would be the sixth one in the Cape Floristic Region and could enable a continuous band of biosphere reserves, with the new Biosphere Reserve connecting the Kogelberg in the west and the Gouritz in the east.

Biosphere Reserves are areas of terrestrial and coastal/marine ecosystems which are internationally recognized within the framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)'s Programme on Man and the Biosphere (MAB). They are established "to promote and demonstrate a balanced relationship between humans and the biosphere". Biosphere reserves are designated by the International Coordinating Council of the MAB Programme at the request of the State concerned. Individual biosphere reserves remain under the sovereign jurisdiction of the State where they are situated. Collectively, all biosphere reserves form a World Network in which participation by States is voluntary – there are currently over 700 Biosphere Reserves in the network.

A case can be made for South Africa to nominate a new Biosphere Reserve, covering large parts of the Overberg District, from mountain catchments to coast, and including high-biodiversity marine areas, given the special features of this area:

- With its towering Cape Fold-mountains, extensive coastline, unique fresh water systems and beautiful landscapes, the Overberg falls wholly into the Cape Floral Kingdom and is home to a remarkable range of species and diverse habitat types. It is truly one of the Western Cape's biodiversity "hotspots". Conservation and good management of its natural capital are vital, as it provides ecosystem services essential to homes, farms and businesses.
- The area includes Cape Agulhas, the southernmost tip of Africa, which is the meeting point of the Atlantic and Indian oceanic systems. These converging systems create ideal conditions for a remarkable ecotone of highly diverse fauna and flora, including numerous endemic species of mammals, reptiles, insects, amphibians and birds. The 230 km Overberg coastline stretches from Rooiels in the west to Infanta in the east, with beautiful beaches and rocky shores, and 11 estuaries, several of which remain in a near-natural state, which provide breeding grounds for marine species on which the fisheries sector depends.
- The Overberg contains some of the largest and most intact remnants of Renosterveld vegetation, a part of the Cape Floral Kingdom that grows on nutrient-rich soils and has been largely replaced by agriculture. Renosterveld is the richest bulb habitat on Earth, displaying a spectacular bloom over the spring season, but is also one of the most threatened vegetation types in the world, with only 3% of its original extent remaining. Another remnant vegetation type in the area in similar straits and requiring serious attention is the Elim Ferricrete Fynbos.

- A large number of wetlands are found throughout the Overberg, including the unique 26,000 ha Nuwejaars Wetlands system of the Agulhas Plain and two RAMSAR sites (De Hoop and De Mond) which are also of international importance for bird conservation.
- The Overberg contains the Langeberg mountain range – one of the country's 22 Strategic Water Source Areas, and is one of the important recharge areas of the Table Mountain Group Aquifer – the second largest aquifer in South Africa and an important water source for the entire Western Cape. In addition to the aquifer's importance for boreholes providing water to many homes and farms, it also supports various ecosystems and vegetation types, including smaller seeps, springs, wetlands, river and riparian habitats.



At the AGM it was agreed that a blue-green concept should be used in investigating the option of a Biosphere Reserve. As well as incorporating Marine Protected Areas, the nomination for a Biosphere Reserve would need to include globally recognised Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (ESBAs), currently being researched with support of SANBI and CapeNature. The Overstand and Cape Agulhas coastline falls into one of South Africa's ESBAs, called the Seas of Good Hope.

Figure 16a Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas; Figure 16b Seas of Good Hope ESBA

Proposed zonation of the EBSA into Conservation (medium green) and Impact Management (light green) Zones. MPAs are overlaid in orange outlines, with the extent within the EBSA given in dark green. Click on each of the zones to view the proposed management recommendations.

Process for setting up a Biosphere Reserve

In South Africa, support is provided by provincial government to the applications process, while the decision to submit a nomination to UNESCO is made at the level of the national Cabinet. Initial discussions have been held as part of the this consultancy with the Western Cape Department of Environment Affairs and Development Planning (DEA&DP) to find out more about the process, and

contact has been made with the relevant officials in the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE). Informal support has been expressed by representatives of SANParks, CapeNature and the Overberg District Municipality during partner discussions, but a formal process would need to be launched, if so decided by the ABI partnership following the investigation beginning in November 2021.

Based on a presentation from DFFE, the steps involved in establishing a Biosphere Reserve are set out in full below, to help ABI partners assess how much effort goes into the process:

Biosphere Establishment Process – Key Steps

STEP 1: Write a Formal letter to Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries outlining the intent for establishment of the Biosphere Reserve

STEP 2: Create a Biosphere Reserve Working Group / Task Team

The BR Working Group/Task Team must meet regularly to discuss progress and address challenges encountered, must be a true reflection of organizations in that region, and must be *comprised of the following members:*

- Representatives from National Commission for UNESCO
- Representatives of MAB National Committee
- Representatives of Governmental institutions responsible for Environment/Conservation
- Representatives of Non Governmental Organizations working in the area
- Representatives from the Core Areas
- Representatives of Local Communities
- Representative from Local Government
- Representatives from Research institutions
- Representatives from Private Sector

Optional

- Representatives from UNESCO Regional Office

STEP 3: Development of the Feasibility Study

The feasibility Study provide an analysis to determine the following:

- The ecological feasibility and coherence of proposed BR
- Assess the contribution to sustainable development of the region while promoting the biodiversity conservation
- The logistic and institutional feasibility of managing the BR

STEP 4: Get familiar with BR Nomination Dossier

This is mainly to check the following:

- Legal protection of the Core Area
- Value for biodiversity conservation
- Ongoing of research on specific ecosystem
- On-going studies on human-environment relationship
- Involvement of local communities
- Value added benefits of the BRs
- Educational activities related to nature and culture

STEP 5: Initiate drafting the BR Nomination form
This is mainly to check the following:

- Prepare a Zero draft Zonation plan for the BR
- Designating core, buffer and transition zones
- Develop BR specific zonation criteria

STEP 6: Organize Broader Stakeholder Consultative meetings at local level

- Inform about objectives of the proposed BR
- Listen to "fears" regarding of the proposed BR
- Explain the benefits which may be accrued from the BR
- Inform about the potential benefits
- Present the proposed Zonation and finalize Zonations with stakeholders
- Prepare Management Plan for the BR
- Get necessary approvals and endorsement for the BR

STEP 7: Process of submitting nomination Dossier and approval

- The Nomination Dossier reviewed by the National MAB Committee through its dedicated Working Group
- Nomination Dossier forwarded to the UNESCO MAB Focal Department by the Provincial Department of Environment before set deadline
- Completed Nomination Dossier submitted to Cabinet for approval
- Minister endorses the Nomination dossier, and forwarded to UNESCO through Diplomatic Channels before deadline
- UNESCO MAB Secretariat check the dossier for completeness
- UNESCO International Advisory Committee for BRs evaluate the nomination dossier and make recommendation for approval/deferral/or request further information
- Recommendation of the UNESCO MAB Advisory Committee submitted to MAB ICC for final decision
- UNESCO Director General formally notifies State on the approval of the proposed site and issue certificate
- Official launch of the BR with media exposure

STEP 8: Ten Year Periodic Review
Every Ten Years BRs are required to submit Periodic Review of the Biosphere Reserve to UNESCO:

- Critical self-assessment by the MAB National Committee and BRs on the effective management of the BR
- Periodic Review reviewed and Assessed by the UNESCO MAB Advisory Committee and makes recommendation to the MAB ICC
- MAB ICC determines if the BR is effectively managed

(Steps from presentation on "Designation of Man and Biosphere Reserves" by Vongani Maringa, DFFE)

In initial discussions with partners it was felt that, while going through the nomination process was not too onerous, it would be important to have a thorough stakeholder consultation process, particularly if famers across the Rûens area, not previously involved with ABI, were to be meaningfully

engaged in efforts to promote more sustainable farming practices. A very large Biosphere Reserve, in which most of the inhabitants remained unaware of its existence, would not be meaningful. Advice provided in discussions with the Waterberg, Kogelberg and Gouritz Biosphere Reserve coordination teams was that this process can take 18 months to two years, if conducted thoroughly. It was also suggested that financial support be sought to enable a consultant to work on this process on behalf of the ABI committee, and guided by the ABI working group set up for this purpose.

In confirming the suitability of the Greater Agulhas or Overberg area to become a Biosphere Reserve, both national and international criteria would need to be applied and tested, before making the nomination, and the support of a wide set of stakeholders formally recorded, including the key government agencies involved in conservation at the various levels. The criteria currently used by the South African Government in considering applications for an area to become a Biosphere Reserve in South Africa are set out below:

Table 2. *Criteria for the nomination of a Biosphere Reserve in South Africa*

GENERAL	Mandatory (M) Evaluation (E)
1. **Meets requirements of Seville Strategy and Article 4 of the Statutory Framework of the WNBR.** *Biosphere Reserves need to address the three complementary functions within a 3-tiered zonation system of core, buffer and transition areas, as described in the Seville Strategy, as well as conform to all seven criteria as listed in Article 4 of the Statutory Framework of the WNBR. This information is needed in order to complete the prescribed UNESCO MAB nomination form.*	M
2. **Is committed to sustainable development practices.** *Biosphere Reserve management entity needs to make a statement related to its commitment to promoting and supporting sustainable development practices.*	M
3. **Ensures long-term perpetuation of biosphere reserve/chances of success.** *Management plan shows how the Biosphere Reserve will be implemented successfully, efficiently and effectively over the long-term. BR has buy-in from stakeholders, support from local communities, support from municipalities (particularly on spatial planning) and a sound financing structure.*	M
4. **Has proof of majority stakeholder support for the establishment of Biosphere Reserve.** *Biosphere Reserve management entity needs to supply the results of surveys addressed to all major stakeholders and all public participation and awareness events, indicating majority support for the establishment of the Biosphere Reserve.*	M

To meet the global criteria of the Man and Biosphere (MAB) programme of UNESCO, a potential Biosphere Reserve being nominated must (according to the nomination form):

- Encompass a mosaic of ecological systems representative of major biogeographic region(s), including a gradation of human interventions
- Be of significance for biological diversity conservation
- Provide an opportunity to explore and demonstrate approaches to sustainable development on a regional scale
- Have an appropriate size to serve the three functions of biosphere reserves, i.e. core, buffer and transition.

The definition of the Core, Buffer and Transition zones to be included in the zonation are as follows, and additional information must be provided about the interaction between the three areas:

- **CORE**: a legally constituted core area or areas devoted to long term protection, according to the conservation objectives of the biosphere reserve, and of sufficient size to meet these objectives
- **BUFFER**: a buffer zone or zones clearly identified and surrounding or contiguous to the core area or areas, where only activities compatible with the conservation objectives can take place.
- **TRANSITION**: an outer transition area where sustainable resource management practices are promoted and developed.

In order to help assess the feasibility of the biosphere option for ABI, an analysis was conducted through the Green Trust-supported consultancy of how the zonation might potentially work. This was done by identifying all the different categories of protected areas and biodiversity stewardship currently present in the Overberg region, based on South African legislation, and analyzing which could be potentially considered part of the Core, and which part of the Buffer. The main categories of conservation protection existing in the region are shown in the table below, with examples, and the rationale for the analysis in each case. This analysis has been discussed informally with key stakeholders including Cape Nature, the Fynbos Trust and the Overberg Renosterveld Conservation, and was presented at the ABI Annual General Meeting in late October 2021.

Figure 17: Categories of conservation protection in the Overberg and suitability for Biosphere zones

Category	Ownership	Example	Biosphere	Rationale
1. National Parks	State	Agulhas NP	Core[1]	Declared a NP in terms of Section 20 of NEMPAA
2. Provincial Nature Reserve	State	De Hoop	Core	Declared a NP in terms of Section 23 of NEMPAA
3. Contractual Nature Reserve	Private or communal	Several	Core	Declared a NP in terms of Section 23 of NEMPAA, Restrictions on Ttitle Deeds (TD)
4. Protected Environment (National)	Private or communal	None	Core	Declared a PE in terms of Section 28 of NEMPAA, Restrictions on TD Signed with National Minister
5. Protected Environment (Provincial)	Private or communal	Walker Bay (in process)	Core	Declared a PE in terms of Section 28 of NEMPAA, Restrictions on TD Signed with Provincial MEC
6. Former "Private Nature Reserve"	Private or communal	Many	Core	Being regularized to Section 23, Restrictions on TD
7. Servitude in favour of conservation NGO	Private or communal	19 ORCT servitudes, also some with FFI, EWT, Birdlife, WWF	Core	Restrictions on TD in favour of Conservation NGO
8. Special Management Area	Private or communal	Nuwejaars Wetland Area	Core	Restrictions on TD in favour of NWLOA (80% majority to change)
9. Biodiversity Management Agreement	Private or communal	Few	Core	99-year contract with Provincial Conservation Authority, signed in terms of contract law
10. Biodiversity Management Agreement	Private or communal	Few	Buffer[2]	5 to 30-year contract with Provincial Conservation Authority, signed in terms of contract law
11. Conservancies	Private or communal	Many	Buffer	No restrictions

Using the above categories, a map was drawn as part of the Green Trust-supported consultancy of the potential future Biosphere Core areas (shown as dark green on the map) and Biosphere Buffer areas (shown as light green). The map is available in high resolution and can be printed out at A0 size on request. The distribution of light and dark green areas that results, suggests two potential configurations for a Biosphere Reserve:

- EITHER a narrower area focused on the Agulhas Plain covering the coastal plain up to the Napier Mountains, from the Bot River mouth in the west to the Breede River mouth in the East, with the

southern tip of Africa as the iconic centre-point, extending out into the marine environment. This option would have a small Transition zone around the Core and Buffer areas, and could be called the Agulhas Biosphere Reserve.

- OR A much larger area that has the same areas as Core and Buffer, but also incorporates the Langeberg Mountains as Core, and includes much of the farmlands of the Overberg District as Transition zone. In the latter option, the idea would be to go beyond the conservation-minded stakeholders of the Agulhas Plain to engage with landowners across the District on making agricultural practice more sustainable. This is consistent with the definition of the Transition Zone which states that "sustainable resource management practices" are merely "promoted and developed", and not that such practices must already be widespread or deeply embedded.

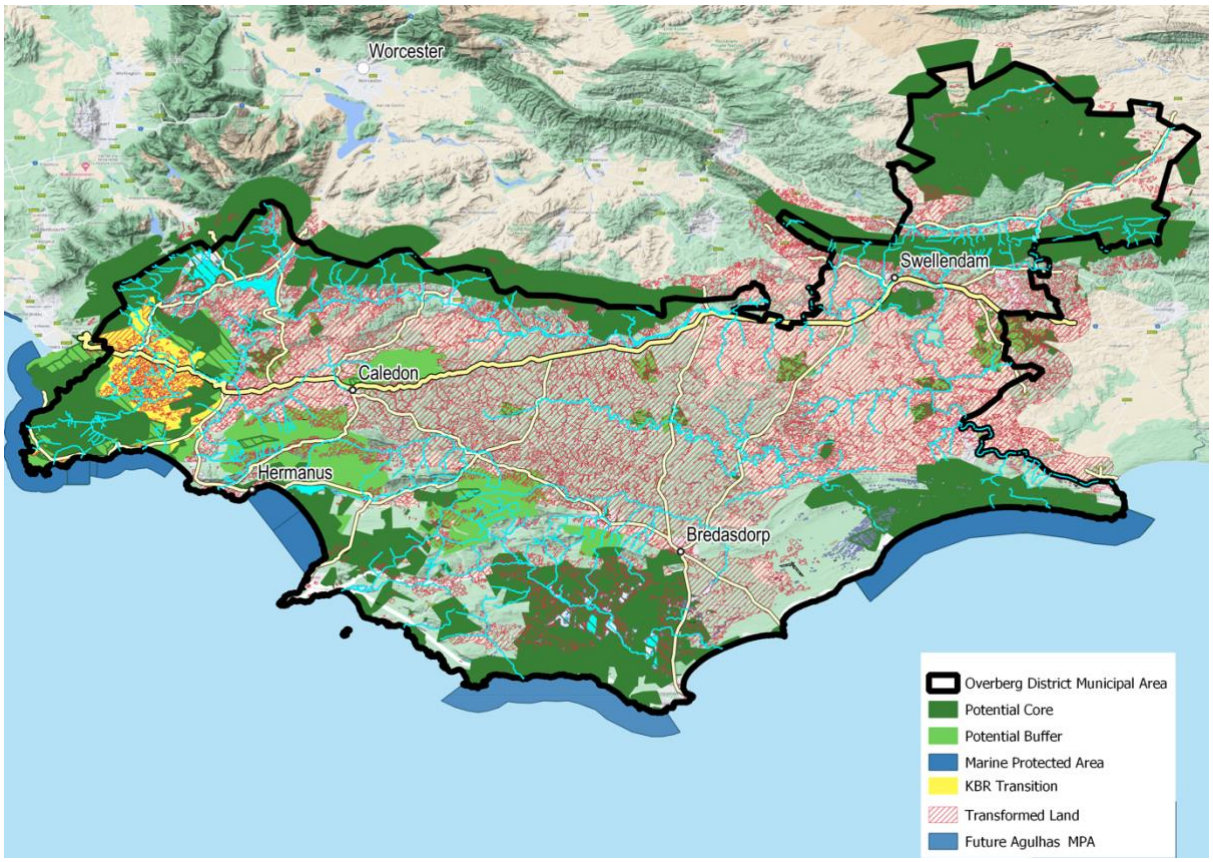


Figure 18: Map of potential Biosphere Reserve elements, created by E. Swart, FVCT

From the discussion with partners, as well as at the ABI Annual General Meeting in late October 2021, a picture has emerged of the possible pros and cons of becoming a Biosphere Reserve. The working group established out of the AGM will be taking this discussion further – investigating whether the pros outweigh the cons overall, looking at what the most appropriate boundaries and zonation might be, and exploring how the nomination process could be planned and resourced.

Strengths of being a Biosphere Reserve

1. The UNESCO Man and the Biosphere programme provides a globally recognized brand for tourism partners of ABI to use in advertising their establishments and activities, attracting new visitors to the region and supporting growth of jobs in the sector.

2. Being a Biosphere provides a 'hook' for international fundraising, since the special environmental value of the area and the commitment of stakeholders to preserving it are immediately apparent.
3. The broad scope of a Biosphere Reserve, moving beyond the biodiversity conservation sector, would enable engagement with many new partners, including communities and landowners previously not involved in sustainability efforts.
4. A Biosphere Reserve could capture the imagination of the public and visitors to the area, making people aware of how they can play a part in achieving a shared vision of sustainability.
5. The structure of three Zones in a Biosphere Reserve would enable the conservation sector to present to the world in a clear and simple manner the impact of the complex patchwork of public and private protected areas, and arrangements for biodiversity stewardship.
6. A Biosphere Reserve Company could become an alternative governance mechanism for an expended ABI partnership, with ABI partners becoming Members of the Biosphere Reserve instead.

Limitations of being a Biosphere reserve

1. Being a Biosphere Reserve does not enable any automatic access to sources of funding, except for a small contribution to administrative costs from the Western Cape Provincial Government.
2. There are no additional 'legal teeth' to prevent inappropriate or unsustainable development in a Biosphere Reserve, or ensure compliance with South African environmental and development planning legislation.
3. No rights are given or taken away in the process of becoming a Biosphere Reserve – this could be a strength from a landowner's perspective, or a limitation from a conservation perspective.
4. A Biosphere Reserve Company might facilitate activities in a wide range of areas, but will no doubt lack the particular focus achieved by a partnership like ABI on biodiversity conservation and landscape management.

Taking into account the above potential pros and cons, and the two alternatives on geographical scope presented above, there are three potential variations on how a Biosphere Reserve might be defined, with differing impacts on the ABI partnership:

Option 1: Establish an Agulhas (or Greater Agulhas) Biosphere Reserve that has a limited geographic scope and replaces ABI

Option 2: Establish an Overberg Biosphere Reserve and discontinue ABI, with ABI Partners becoming Biosphere Members instead, and the functions being taken over by the new structure

Option 3: Establish an Overberg Biosphere Reserve for large-scale landscape-level coordination of sustainability initiatives, but retain ABI for joint actions that are still needed on the Agulhas Plain. There would simultaneously be other smaller landscape initiatives that might remain within the new Biosphere Reserve, for example a Lower Breede Collaborative Extension Group, or a Langeberg Strategic Water Source Area partnership (neither of which are yet in existence, but are under discussion).

The Way Forward

The ABI partnership has much to be proud of and much to look forward to, as it moves into the next phase to 2030. Because the full scope of the revisioning process was not possible in the short time available to complete the ABI re-visioning project in its full iteration as initially proposed to the WWF Nedbank Green Trust, this report does not set out a full ten-year plan. Rather it seeks to make practical recommendations on the institutional and financial models than can take ABI forward smoothly over the next two years, transitioning into the next phase in a manner that enables the partnership to enhance its focus and impact. The recommendations from each main section of the report are repeated here for ease of reference, and should be read along with the detail in the proposed two Priority Joint Actions: Scaling up Ecological Restoration on the Agulhas Plain (Aliens & Fire), and Investigating the Establishment of a Biosphere Reserve.

Updating the ABI Way 1: Recommendations

It is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Convene' function:

1. Maintain the current governance arrangements, with the ABI Committee, elected at the Annual General Meeting by the registered ABI Members, overseeing its work in terms of the ABI Constitution.
2. Conduct a membership drive to get people in ABI's wider network to sign up as Partners.
3. Register ABI (the existing voluntary association) as a Non-Profit Organization (NPO) with the Department of Social Development, and apply to SARS for Public Benefit Organization (PBO) status.
4. Carry out the mandate from the October 2021 AGM for the ABI Committee to work with partners to establish Working Groups to address strategic priorities (see Conceptualise section).
5. Seek funding to enable a small ABI coordination function starting in early 2022, reporting to the ABI Committee, and taking over this role from the previous team of staff of the Flower Valley Conservation Trust.
6. Work with Flower Valley Conservation Trust on a handover of coordination unit equipment, as well as the systems for partner databases, emailing system, website, social media, accounting, financial reporting, monitoring, mapping and fundraising.
7. Take steps to ensure that the important alien clearing work with support of private landowners and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment can be continued.

Updating the ABI Way 2: Recommendations

It is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Collate' function:

1. Working group coordinators of thematic focus areas (see below) to discuss with group whether there are particular types of data that would be useful for that working group to commit themselves to tracking over time.

2. At minimum, each working group to select one simple piece of data which can serve as a headline indictor, or a proxy indicator, for progress in the area, e.g. number of small business employees trained over the year through efforts of ABI partners.
3. Results on all thematic focus areas' headline indicators to be reported at the Annual General Meeting and in ABI's own communications, using the website, newsletter / blog and social media.
4. Results on all thematic focus areas' headline indicators to be made available to local newspapers and radio stations through media releases, offering ABI representatives to be interviewed.
5. Working group coordinators to track important new policy and strategy documents, and legal compliance requirements, and circulate links to their WhatsApp group, and send the documents to the ABI coordination for uploading on the website.

Updating the ABI Way 3: Recommendations

It is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Conceptualise' function:

1. ABI Committee to put out a call for those interested to join a list of proposed working groups covering these seven suggested Thematic Focus Areas, and calling for additional suggestions or alternative ways of grouping these topics as well.

ABI Theme	Proposed Thematic Focus Area Working Group	No. of meetings proposed per year
Land Use Planning & Management	Aliens & Fire	2-3
	Biodiversity Stewardship	1-2
	Conservation Agriculture	1-2
	Estuaries and Catchments	1-2
Green Economy	Biomass Value Addition	1-2
Environmental Education	SMME Upskilling	1-2
Responsible Tourism	Biosphere Establishment	2-3

2. ABI coordination unit to establish Working Groups in the areas in which a sufficient level of interest in participating has been expressed by individuals and organizations.
3. ABI Committee to put out a call identifying the decided Working Groups and asking members to indicate where they would like to be part of an information sharing network that will be attached to each group.
4. ABI coordination unit to ask working groups to appoint a Volunteer Coordinator whose job description is proposed to be as follows:
    a. Convene face-to-face meetings, or Zoom if necessary, according to agreed schedule (one to three times a year)
    b. Set up a WhatsApp group for working group members who would like to participate in meetings and be actively involved

c. Set up a second WhatsApp group for network members who want to receive information
d. Track important policies and strategies in this area and share them with the network WhatsApp group and the ABI communications function in the coordination unit
e. Cooperate with the working group to establish and monitor at least one headline indicator for tracking an communicating progress of ABI partners in this area
f. Provide a short written report on the above to the ABI Committee one month before the date of the Annual General Meeting.

Updating the ABI Way 4: Recommendations

It is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Cross-scale communications and learning' function:

1. ABI Committee to ensure that the partnership is represented in engagements with partners at district level.
2. ABI Committee to continue fundraising to support a coordination unit which will ideally include in-house or external capacity for communications and learning.
3. Coordination unit to hire and brief communications capacity, once resources are available.
4. ABI Committee to decide on core communications and learning functions, e.g.
    a. Support the holding of regular partners' learning events and showcase the results
    b. Update the ABI website to include a page for each Thematic Focal Area, and cooperate with volunteer coordinators of working groups to gather and upload key documents
    c. Use the ABI digital platforms (website, social media and emailers) and media opportunities to tell inspiring stories, and to profile partners to each other and to a wider audience
    d. Use social media to share news and advertise events
    e. Consider the website, social media or a purpose-designed app to create a "virtual marketplace" for ABI partners to advertise and access services, jobs and tenders etc
    f. Use mainstream media and own social media to publicise the results of the annual progress assessment by each working group of its headline indicator.
5. Include sustainability learning as part of the brief of the working group investigating the establishment of a Biosphere Reserve.

Updating the ABI Way 5: Recommendations

It is recommended that the following steps be carried out in the medium term (2022-2023) by the ABI partnership, in relation to the 'Capitalise' function:

1. ABI coordination unit to track investments made towards conservation and landscape management across the region on an annual basis through a mini-survey.
2. Working group investigating establishing a Biosphere Reserve to bring to the ABI Committee's attention if/when it reaches that point: a) the need to seek financial support for a consultant to prepare the nomination documents, and b) the need to register a Non-Profit Company with the Companies and Intellectual Property Commission (CIPC), as the basis for a future Biosphere Reserve Company.

3. Short-term actions are suggested below, to move forward in each of the identified funding avenues, for the ABI committee / coordination unit to take action as follows:
4. **ABI Landscape Restoration Fund**: Complete the process of registering the ABI voluntary association as an NPO, and applying for PBO status, with a separate bank account which could be used to receive contributions to a special-purpose fund for landscape restoration, including strategic coordination of alien and fire management.
5. **Municipal rates levy:** Prepare a presentation of the case for a municipal rates levy for landscape restoration, which can be presented as soon as possible to the new Councils and budget committees of the Overstrand and Cape Agulhas Local Municipalities, as well as the Overberg District Municipality.
6. **Engagement with corporates:** Prepare a business case for corporate contributions to a special fund for landscape restoration, which can be presented to companies as needed.
7. **Working for Water:** Prioritise steps to ensure that the important alien clearing work with support of private landowners and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment can be continued in the current cycle.
8. **Presidential Employment Stimulus - Social Employment Fund:** Share information with small businesses and NGOs in the ABI network on any opportunities arising from consortia seeking to access the Fund.
9. **Philanthropic and corporate trusts and foundations:** Approach Drakenstein Trust and the Millennium Trust to discuss ABI partnership taking on responsibility for strategic coordination of aliens and fire management, as well as the NRM contract, and explore opportunities for support; hold discussions with Freshwater Ecosystems group in WWF on potential to put in an application for support in Phase 3 from WWF / WWF Nedbank Green Trust.

List of Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Annex 2: List of ABI Partners

Annex 3: List of Stakeholders Consulted

Annex 4: ABI Constitution

Annex 5: Screening for Greater Overberg Water Fund

Annex 6: ABI Communications Plan 2019-2021

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