

Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

Communications Plan (2019 – 2021)

The communications focus on the Overberg's natural resources & environmental partnerships.



1. Background/Context

The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) is a landscape initiative set up in 2003 under the overarching fynbos conservation and development programme, Cape Action for People and the Environment (C.A.P.E).

During the first phase (2003-2010), ABI became a successful multi-stakeholder partnership between 25 organisations involved in the management and use of our area's natural assets: government, landowners, the private sector and conservation organisations. The ABI Partners implemented a number of projects and programmes aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting economic development on the Agulhas Plain.

Following the launch of ABI's second phase, the aim was amended to strengthen and broaden the partnership to consolidate the gains made in Phase 1, and to operate across the entire Overberg region. Partners devised a new goal: **“Working together to secure a healthy natural environment to provide benefits for all, forever, within the Overberg”**.

ABI operates according to these five objectives, also known as the 5 c's:

1. To convene interested and affected parties to develop a strategy for cooperation to influence land-use and development planning, as well as to develop an integrated development plan for the ABI area.
2. To collate good quality information and data; analyse, communicate and use this data so that it can be utilised as a basis for planning and monitoring of initiatives.
3. To facilitate communications between all parties with a particular focus on engaging local municipalities in the delivery of services that mainstream biodiversity and natural resource conservation.
4. To conceptualise projects and initiatives by supporting partners in the identification of gaps and opportunities, including research, which guide and prioritise conservation action and projects.
5. To raise the cash for and secure investment in priority activities and projects, including sourcing sustainable finance through innovative mechanisms and projects.

ABI has also prioritised its activities according to four themes:

1. Integrated land-use planning (including controlling invasive alien plants) and protected area expansion
2. Viable nature-based, responsible tourism
3. Environmental education and environmental awareness programmes
4. Transitioning to a Green Economy

ABI's 'elevator pitch': ABI is a community that shares a philosophy of working together to secure a productive healthy natural environment in the Overberg. This is known as 'The ABI Way'.

2. Situation analysis – Where are we now?

STRENGTHS to be maximised (Internal; Current; Some control)	WEAKNESSES to be minimised (Internal; Current; Some control)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ABI is well known among certain stakeholders, in particular, land owners involved in the ABI Alien Clearing Programme. ➤ Communication tools and platforms are in place to support ABI's messaging. ➤ ABI has built up a stronger link with government, through its recent programmes and projects (like municipalities) ➤ Most partners are committed to biodiversity conservation. ➤ ABI has good objectives and strong themes according to which it operates. ➤ Partners are representative of government departments, NGOs and landowners. ➤ Extension support offered by Flower Valley Conservation Trust has been invaluable – providing strong buy-in among certain players. ➤ ABI has developed innovative plans and projects – making it a leader in terms of project development and planning. ➤ The Overberg has so many positive messages and stories to tell, to encourage greater support. ➤ The Overberg is enjoying strong conservation support – thanks in part to ABI's support of conservation developments in the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ABI is not well known nor well supported in the Overberg, outside of its immediate projects, like the ABI Alien Clearing Programme. ➤ When an association like ABI doesn't bring resources to the landscape, support may diminish for ABI's goals. ➤ ABI's coordination unit and theme leaders have their own day-to-day tasks, making constant commitment more challenging. ➤ ABI's role is not well understood by parties outside the organisation. ➤ ABI partners don't meet regularly to iron out any obstacles and to implement the 5 c's philosophy. ➤ There is a lack of trust between certain ABI partners. ➤ Lack of funding available to ABI to drive landscape management, in particular extension support. ➤ ABI is a broad landscape initiative, making it harder for the public to understand exactly what ABI is and the value it offers to them. ➤ Partners don't communicate their activities with ABI. ➤ Lack of awareness of ABI partner's mandates and responsibilities. ➤ There is a lack of understanding among many stakeholders as to the environmental value of the Overberg, and the need for good natural resource management.

<p>region (like the district-wide climate change strategy).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ ABI is recognised outside of the Overberg by essential national and international stakeholders. ➤ New capacity has been added to the ABI team, in the form of mapping specialists. This is a strong resource for the ABI partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There's an understanding that ABI only operates on the Agulhas Plain and not beyond.
<p>OPPORTUNITIES to be maximised (External; Future; Little Control)</p>	<p>THREATS to be addressed (External; Future; Little control)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Challenges, such as the water crisis and drought crisis, create opportunities for important conservation messaging led by ABI Partners. ➤ The Overberg is an important agricultural area – and this paves the way for ABI to showcase sustainable agriculture as a corner stone of ABI. ➤ Land reform offers new ways of achieving landscape conservation and rural development. ➤ New communication methods and systems including social media offers new ways to link up with members and communicate info more widely and quicker. ➤ Renewed global emphasis on biodiversity conservation is raising awareness of importance of involvement at local level. ➤ Local municipalities (including the district municipality) have reaffirmed their commitment to good natural resource management. ➤ Investment by government and business in the rural and the green economy aligns with ABI's objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Fire has proven to be a huge challenge in the Overberg in the past year. This threat can be a project the ABI partnership looks to address together. ➤ Macro-economics: Partners (like land users) may struggle to afford recommended changes in agricultural practice and conservation. ➤ Land reform could threaten involvement in ABI. ➤ Unrest in the agricultural sector could affect all working in the agric sector, and thereby damage those relationships key to ABI's success. ➤ Climate change will put pressure on the agriculture and conservation sector and is likely to change the face of the landscape. ➤ Changes in staff at top policy-making structures, for example in municipalities, could hamper potential gains made. ➤ ABI is seen as a competitor to other organisations. ➤ Natural resource management currently not done collectively and not seen as offering economic advantages to landowners. ➤ Communications, activities and leadership in the conservation and agriculture sectors are still divided along gender and racial lines.

In 2019, there are new strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats in the Overberg that deserve to be highlighted. In the Overberg, the focus is currently on:

- Water

- Fire
- Sustainable agriculture
- Invasive plants

In summary:

Many of ABI's communications platforms are already in place, and in use. These can be maximized to improve ABI's reach, and assist ABI to meet its objectives. ABI is also well respected, particularly with donors and external organisations that have worked with and funded ABI in the past, and ABI having received local and international recognition and accolades.

The ABI area itself is of immense conservation value – and can therefore be used to tell great stories. These are stories of good natural resource management, as well as smart agricultural practices – as partners balance the environment with the economics and social development. But there are also serious natural resource management threats. The ABI communications effort will make use of these stories, opportunities and threats to encourage greater conservation awareness – to reach both those working on the landscape, and those working in the different spheres of government.

3. Objectives - Where do we need to go?

IN 2019, ABI REVISED ITS COMMUNICATIONS PLAN, TO SPEAK TO THE LATEST CHALLENGES AND COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS.

The communications objectives are based on ABI's objectives:

1. To convene;
2. To collate;
3. To facilitate communications;
4. To conceptualise;
5. To raise cash.

– but are focused and refined to:

1. Build awareness of the Overberg's natural resource wealth and good natural resource management and challenges.
2. Profile ABI partners in order to encourage collaboration and cooperation.
3. Build brand awareness of ABI & the ABI Partnership through face-to-face and digital platforms.

4. Provide, serve as and communicate ABI as the central platform to house Overberg information on natural resource management and partners roles in the landscape.

4. Target audiences/publics

ABI Committee and Theme Leaders

ABI Coordination Unit

ABI Partners

Potential ABI Partners

Includes:

- NGOs,
- Individuals,
- Groupings,
- Companies etc.

Special interest groups

Includes:

- UNDP,
- Universities & other academic institutions, etc.

Donors (current & potential)

- Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust (current)
- Other potential

National and provincial government

Includes:

- National Department of Environmental Affairs,
- WC Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, etc.
- National and provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

Municipalities

- Cape Agulhas Municipality,
- Overstrand Municipality,
- Theewaterskloof Municipality,
- Swellendam Municipality,
- Overberg District Municipality.

Land user groups

Includes:

- Overberg Distriks Landbouvereniging (ODLV),
- Local farmers' associations,
- Conservancies,

Media

- Print, broadcast, electronic

Opinion Leaders

- Community leaders
- Political leaders
- Experts on ABI-related subjects
- Officials of societies, institutions, trade associations, professional bodies.

5. Key messages

ABI's key messages are audience specific, and will be tailored as such.

We know that: -

- The Overberg holds immense biodiversity, and that the natural resources here need protection;
- The Overberg has many good stories to tell linked to conservation, sustainable agriculture and social development;
- ABI's communications platforms are in place to facilitate communications;
- Good relations with key partners (including land owners) have been built up over the past 15 years.

ABI's key messages should be informative and motivational. As noted in the SWOT analysis, **it is necessary to firstly improve an understanding of the Overberg's conservation value. The timing of this is appropriate – linked in particular to the challenges facing the region (such as the water shortages and the impacts of climate change).**

Overall message are:

- The Overberg is a biodiversity treasure – and there's reason to protect and care for our natural resources.
- BUT: The Overberg faces many environmental threats, which we as partners can address together.

- ABI is made up of partners – who are each fulfilling a role in the landscape.
- ABI is a landscape initiative that is changing the way conservation, land users and government work together.

Applied messages:

ABI Committee and Theme Leaders

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI promotes collaboration and cooperation – which is your task as committee members and theme leader.
- Use the ABI principles and philosophy in your day-to-day tasks and living.

ABI Coordination Unit

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI promotes collaboration and cooperation – which is your task as coordination unit member.
- You represent ABI partners and ‘The ABI Way’ at all times.

ABI Partners

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI promotes collaboration and cooperation – which is your task as an ABI Partner.
- Use the ABI platforms to spread your good conservation message.
- There are partners within ABI working to achieve the same outputs as you; make use of them through the ABI platform.

Potential ABI Partners

- You can enjoy access to resources, information, support and partners to help you achieve your targets for a healthy natural environment in the Overberg.
- Use the ABI platforms to spread your good conservation message.
- There are partners within ABI working to achieve the same outputs as you; make use of them through the ABI platform.

Special interest groups

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- Work with ABI, a partnership that has existed for the past 18 years and has a good reputation.
- ABI's communication channels will ensure your information/study's findings can reach key audiences.

Donors (current & potential)

- ABI has an excellent reputation and 18 years of experience in cost-effectively spending donor's funding with excellent results.
- ABI operates across the Overberg – a region that holds important natural resources that need to be protected.

National and local government

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI has the buy-in of conservation groups, private land owners, land owner groups and conservation organisations. Therefore, you can reach them all through the ABI platform.
- ABI partners can help you reach your environmental and social targets.

Municipalities

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI partners can help you reach your environmental and social targets.
- ABI has the buy-in of conservation groups, private land owners, land owner groups and conservation organisations. Therefore, you can reach them all through the ABI platform.

Land user groups

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI will support you in your conservation efforts in the Overberg – either through direct support, or through access to resources and support.

Media (the channels used to reach many audiences, but must receive its own specific messages).

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI is working to secure a productive healthy natural environment in the Overberg.
- ABI can offer you access to experts in specific fields related to ABI's themes.

Opinion Leaders

- The Overberg is an important biodiversity hotspot where good natural resource management is essential.
- ABI is working to secure a productive healthy natural environment in the Overberg.
- ABI has an excellent reputation and 15 years of experience as a successful partnership.

6. Action Plan – How will we get there?

ABI's High-Impact Activities (creating acceptance, and in some instances raising awareness of ABI's benefits):

Meetings with ABI Partners:

Responsible Entity:	Convened by ABI Coordination Unit, with input from the Committee and Theme Leaders.
Description:	These meetings are the ideal opportunity to inform partners of relevant ABI news, and to inform the ABI Coordination Unit of important information that requires action. The meetings are the perfect platform to learn about partner's activities and sectors, to find better ways of working together. Here partners will be in a position to show how they are promoting 'The ABI Way'.
Frequency:	2 per year – or as the need arises.
Target:	ABI Committee and Theme Leaders, Partners, ABI Coordination Unit, potential partners, special interest groups, land users, government, municipalities, conservation authorities.
Message:	Get access to resources and the right people, and become better informed on the activities currently going on in your sector in the Overberg, to allow you to work better with partners, and therefore achieve more together.
Distribution channel:	Face-to-Face (However, this information can then be shared via other ABI communications platforms, such as the website).

Meetings with ABI Committee:

Responsible Entity: Convened by ABI Coordination Unit or ABI Committee.

Description: The meetings are intended to inform the Committee of relevant information and governance support required, and vice versa, to inform the ABI Coordination Unit of important information that requires action. The meetings will ensure a close working relationship between the Committee and the Coordination Unit in order to maximize ABI's voice.

Frequency: As required.

Target: ABI Committee, ABI Coordination Unit and ultimately ABI Partners.

Message: Encourage Committee members, the Coordination Unit and partners to value the Overberg's natural resource wealth, and the need to protect it via partnerships.

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face

Meetings with ABI Theme Leaders & theme players:

Responsible Entity: Convened by ABI Coordination Unit or Theme Leaders.

Description: The meetings are intended to provide information to stakeholders and partners in a sector (related to the theme), and to receive feedback from these players to make the best possible decisions for the area. These meetings would generally be driven by the theme leaders, who have a good understanding of the theme.

Frequency: As required.

Target: ABI Theme Leaders, ABI Coordination Unit and other players in the specific theme areas/sectors.

Message: Encourage Theme Leaders, the Coordination Unit and partners to value the Overberg's natural resource wealth, and the need to protect it via partnerships..

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face (However, this information can then be shared via other ABI communications platforms, such as the website).

Workshops with strategic partners & stakeholders (related to specific themes or threats):

Responsible Entity: Convened by ABI Coordination Unit.

Description: These workshops will offer a crucial platform to reach specific partners and interested stakeholders on specific subjects that are of interest to them. They will serve as an opportunity to become better informed and allow collective action.

Frequency: As required

Target: ABI Partners, potential partners, government, municipalities, land user groups.

Message: ABI offers you the platform to meet others who are dealing with the same issues and helps facilitate collective action where needed to address threats to the Overberg's environmental stresses..

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face (However, this information can then be shared via other ABI communications platforms, such as the website).

One-on-One communication with key people:

Responsible Entity: Initiated by the ABI Coordination Unit/Committee

Description: These will be personal meetings between the ABI Coordination Unit lead person or the ABI Committee, and partners and interested parties, and will encourage information-sharing on programmes and projects.

Frequency: Ongoing

Target: ABI Partners, ABI Committee, Coordination Unit, potential partners and interest parties operating in key sectors in which ABI operates.

Message: ABI offers the platform for your programme to reach a broader audience, and to encourage those operating in similar sectors to work with you, to benefit the environmental health of the Overberg.

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face (However, this information can then be shared via other ABI communications platforms, such as the website).

Face-to-Face communication by ABI Committee:

Responsible Entity: ABI Committee

Description: Emphasis is on the ABI Committee holding sway with national and local government and municipalities and other key decision-makers, and therefore meeting with these relevant people to represent ABI at face-to-face meetings.

Frequency: Ongoing

Target: Government, municipalities, land user groups, corporates, patrons.

Message: ABI is working to bring about positive change where possible, encouraging government, municipalities, conservation groups and land users to work closely together to benefit the landscape and all living on it. And we live in a biodiversity rich area, the Overberg, home to natural resources that need protecting.

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face (However, information can then be disseminated at ABI Partner meetings, workshops and working group meetings).

Media (and media conferences when relevant):

Responsible Entity: ABI Coordination Unit, with input and support from ABI Committee, Theme Leaders and partners

Description: Media will be invited to the ABI area to promote the activities of ABI and the ABI Partners.

Frequency: Ongoing

Target: Media and consumers

Message: ABI operates in the Overberg, a region of rich biodiversity and important natural resources that need protecting. ABI is a leading landscape initiative that is changing the way conservation, land users and government work together. ABI has an excellent reputation as an organisation that facilitates positive change.

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face with media, accompanied by relevant media folders and information.

Presentations:

Responsible Entity: ABI Coordination Unit, Committee and Theme Leaders

Description: The ABI Coordination Unit, Committee and Theme Leaders will represent ABI at specific events through presentations on ABI, in order to encourage new partnerships and closer cooperation.

Frequency: Ongoing

Target: Potential partners, government, municipalities, land user groups, researchers, consumers.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, and offer you the platform to work closely with other partners to maximize achievements and results.

Distribution channel: Face-to-Face

Relevant expos:

Responsible Entity: ABI Coordination Unit, with input and support from Committee, Theme Leaders and ABI Partners.

Description: ABI will be present at relevant exhibitions, as selected by the Coordination Unit, Committee, Theme Leaders and partners, bearing in mind the limited number of staff who could attend. As a result, exhibitions must be carefully selected to achieve maximum results.

Frequency: Where required

Target: Potential partners, Consumers, donors, government, municipalities, researchers.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, and offer you the platform to work closely with other partners to maximize achievements and results.

Distribution channel: Presence at exhibitions

ABI's Supportive Activities:

ABI Newsletter:

Responsible Entity: Sent out by the ABI Coordination Unit to ABI Partners and other interested parties.

Description: A short newsletter of strong quality containing relevant, essential and interesting information linked to ABI, the Overberg and its partners, including good news stories about the region's conservation action.

Frequency: 3 times per year

Target: ABI Partners, potential partners, donors, government, municipalities and other interested parties.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, and offer you the platform to work closely with other partners to maximize achievements and results.

Distribution channel: Email

ABI Alerts:

Responsible Entity: Sent out by the ABI Coordination Unit to specific lists.

Description: Alerts of strong quality informing stakeholders of important news and events that would require a quick response, using information compiled by the Coordination Unit or partners.

Frequency: As and when necessary information needs to be shared.

Target: ABI Partners, potential partners, government, municipalities, land user groups, and other interested parties.

Message: ABI is in the position to inform partners about important events and to inform partners of activities and achievements.

Distribution channel: Email

Social Media:

Responsible Entity: Updated by the ABI Coordination Unit.

Description: Posts of a strong quality on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram on ABI-related news and other news that affects the area.

Frequency: As and when necessary information needs to be shared.

Target: ABI Partners, interested parties, donors and the general public.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, each fulfilling specific tasks in the environmental sector.

Distribution channel: Social media

Media releases:

Responsible Entity: Written and sent out by the ABI Coordination Unit, with Committee input.

Description: Media releases will maintain a strong quality, and will be tailored for specific media or partner's newsletters. They will be sent to specific publications that would be interested in the topic.

Frequency: As and when relevant information that would be of interest to the media is available.

Target: Increase awareness of ABI and the Overberg region.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, and offer you the platform to work closely with other partners to maximize achievements and results.

Distribution channel: Email

Feature articles:

Responsible Entity: Sent out by the ABI Coordination Unit.

Description: Features will of a strong quality, and will be tailored for specific media. They will be sent to specific publications that would be interested in the topic.

Frequency: As and when a topic is likely to be picked up by specific media.

Target: Increase awareness of ABI and the Overberg.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape.

Distribution channel: Email, junkets

Reports and booklets:

Responsible Entity: Compiled and distributed by the ABI Coordination Unit, with input from Committee members, Theme Leaders and partners.

Description: Reports and booklets will offer information on a specific topic, such as invasive alien clearing – providing information to the target audience, while raising awareness of ABI and the Overberg.

Frequency: When required

Target: ABI Partners, potential partners, donors, potential donors, interested stakeholders, government, municipalities and consumers.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape.

Distribution channel: Print and PDF (email)

Brochures, posters, pamphlets and stickers:

Responsible Entity: Developed by the ABI Coordination Unit with input from experts, with sign off by the ABI Committee.

Description: The brochures, pamphlets and stickers will be distributed by all signed ABI Partners at relevant events.

Frequency: On-going development

Target: Consumers, potential ABI Partners, donors, potential donors, government, municipalities.

Message: The Overberg offers immense natural resource wealth and good natural resource management is therefore essential. ABI partners perform that role across the landscape, and offer you the platform to work closely with other partners to maximize achievements and results.

Distribution channel: Print, CDs

Outdoor signage:

Responsible Entity: Created by ABI Coordination Unit and relevant experts, with sign off by ABI Committee.

Description: The outdoor signage will be placed at appropriate points in the Overberg (with the necessary permission), for example along the Foot of Africa marathon route, etc.

Frequency: Once-off, but updated down the line.

Target: Consumers, ABI Partners, ABI potential partners, donors, potential donors, government, municipalities, land user groups.

Message: ABI is working to protect the Overberg landscape, through its own programmes and through partnerships.

Distribution channel: Outdoor signs

Studies and research:

Responsible Entity: ABI Partners decide on the studies required on ABI-related topics. The ABI Coordination Unit will be responsible for disseminating the information at relevant events (see High Impact Activities, below).

Description: The ABI Coordination Unit and relevant ABI Partners will work closely with those institutions that will undertake the various studies. These studies will allow partners to become better informed on important conservation, social and economic-related subjects from across the Overberg.

Frequency: On-going

Target: ABI Partners, potential partners, government, municipalities, media, general public, special interest groups, land user groups.

Message: ABI allows partners, potential partners and interested stakeholders to assist each other to work better and smarter together. ABI then offers the platform from which important information can be disseminated.

Distribution channel: Workshops, email, websites, social media, meetings, media.

In summary:

The above mentioned high-impact and supportive activities will offer the opportunity to showcase the conservation value of the Overberg, the need to protect it, and the work partners are doing across the landscape.

7. Evaluation

Monitoring the impact that ABI is having on all partners and other stakeholders is vital, to assess ABI's reach, its strengths and also its obstacles. These results will show whether ABI is meeting its overarching objectives (the five c's), as well as its communications objectives. We propose a combination of approaches to measure and monitor ABI's reach.

Medium	Monitoring
<i>Supportive Activities:</i>	
Website	Statistics to be compiled
Social Media	ABI's social media statistics compiled
ABI Alerts	Campaigns to be monitored individually
ABI Newsletter	Newsletter to be monitored individually
Media and feature articles	Print media publication and broadcast media tracked
Outdoor signage	Track number of signs and strategic placement
<i>High-impact Activities</i>	
Quantitative Research	<u>Short surveys of different stakeholders:</u> Includes ABI Partners, potential partners, attendees at various ABI events and workshops over a 12-month period. Collect and collate data and extrapolate results. This can be done via digital or offline feedback forms.

9. Conclusion

The ABI communications plan seeks to address the opportunities and challenges identified in this planning document. The Overberg is an important region – in terms of its natural resources. It's an agricultural stronghold, and has strong biodiversity value. Therefore it must be protected.

That's where ABI comes in. ABI represents the various partners undertaking the work across the landscape. So as per this document, the first step is to raise awareness as the value of the Overberg. Then to showcase the work that ABI partners are undertaking to protect its natural resources. This objective works closely with building ABI's brand via various platforms.