

Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative

(ABI) Alien Clearing Project



The Agulhas Biodiversity Initiative (ABI) Alien Clearing Project is currently at the end of year two of implementation. The project forms part of the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA's) Land User Incentive Scheme – a scheme through which the Department is testing a new way of supporting private landowners in their bid to control and eradicate invasive alien plants. The ABI Alien Clearing Project received funding to the tune of R18-million for the three years between 2013 and 2016. A further R9-million will be brought in to support the project from co-funding commitments, including the support of NGOs, Land User Groups, landowners and philanthropists.

Through this project, approximately 30,000 hectares of natural veld are cleared of invasive aliens every year on the Agulhas Plain. During the first year of operation, approximately 350 jobs were created. Now in its second year, around 250 jobs have been created, while the project has supported capacity building and skills development through the various courses and training workshops hosted. The benefits to the region, known as a 'biodiversity hotspot' for its rich fynbos landscapes, its wetlands and its rivers, are immense.

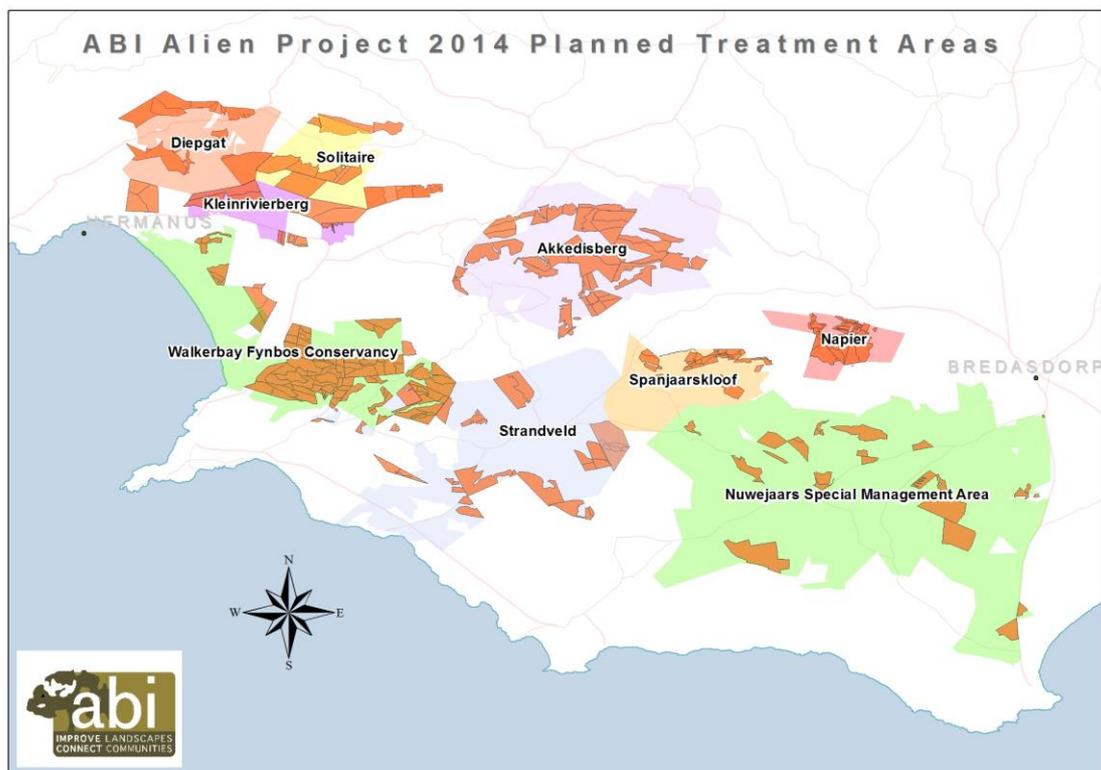
The project model has been lauded by the Department of Environmental Affairs as a model that seems to be working, and one that will be tested on other landscapes. At the launch of the project, ABI (coordinated by Flower Valley Conservation Trust) sent out a call to all willing landowners who wished to participate in the project. Landowners had to be a member of a land user group, such as a conservancy or a farmer's association. The representatives of each land user group were then selected to stand on the ABI Alien Clearing Project Implementation Committee. This committee also consisted of officials from the Overstrand Municipality, the Overberg District Municipality, SANParks and CapeNature. The Department of Agriculture attended the initial committee meetings, and are still invited to attend. This committee took on the role of developing and implementing the project.

Today, the project works with nine land user groups (including six conservancies, one farmer's association, one Special Management Area, and one Resident's Association). Approximately 100 landowners are benefiting directly from the project.

There is a high level of trust and commitment that has already been built up through this project. With playing the role of coordinator and facilitator, landowners, through their land user groups, and government (through DEA) are able to work together to achieve their targets of clearing the land of invasive alien species and creating jobs. ABI's extension role in supporting landowners has been vital in fostering this trust and commitment. ABI has also

taken on the role of communicating directly with government, and undertaking much of the administrative requirements of the project (with landowner and contractor support).

Another major feat associated with the ABI Alien Clearing Project is the extent of the co-funding committed by the landowners to the clearing, by NGOs, by local municipalities and conservation authorities such as CapeNature and SANParks (who support the project's implementation through advice, support, and herbicide where possible), and corporates (such as SAB). This makes this a project driven from the bottom-up, with buy-in from key partners – in the name of a healthy environment and decent jobs.



The project team, the project's Implementation Committee, and government remain completely committed to the model in general, and the project specifically – and remain excited about the results.

For more information, visit: www.agulhasbiodiversity.co.za

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