

NATIONAL PLANNING AND ITS RELATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

by

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SUMMARY:

National planning for environmental protection (air, flora, fauna, etc.) as well as for physical improvement, was taken forwards with the expansion of the Department of Planning to include environmental issues as well. It was unfortunate that departmental adjustments separated environmental issues from physical planning, for these two disciplines are "faces of the same coin". However a great deal of planning during the past five years has actually had the dual 'physical-environmental' axis. Illustrations of this situation are given in the industrial field and in town planning.

OPSOMMING:

Nasionale beplanning vir omgewingsbeskerming (lug, flora, fauna, ens.) en vir verbetering van die fisiese omgewing is aangehelp toe die Departement van Beplanning uitgebrei is om omgewingsake ook in te sluit. Dis ongelukkig dat omgewingsake en fisiese beplanning as gevolg van departementele aanpassings, van mekaar geskei was, want by die twee dissiplines word een en dieselfde saak bloot van twee kante beskou. Desnieteenstaande het baie van die beplanning van die afgelope vyf jaar juis om die gemeenskaplikheid van die dissiplines gewentel. Hierdie situasie word vir die terreine van die nywerheid en stadsbeplanning toegelig.

National planning is a very wide concept and being a Town and Regional Planner by profession I will restrict myself to the spatial and physical aspects of national planning, i.e. those aspects of national planning which manifest themselves ultimately on the ground in terms of towns and townships, factories, urban development, infrastructural development, etc. On the other hand, the environment is an equally wide concept and because of the fact that this conference is sponsored by the National Clean Air Association, I will try to limit myself to the relation between national physical planning and air quality as such.

Right at the outset I want to make a basic statement which will form the framework for this paper and that is that, to my mind, national physical planning and environmental issues are two sides of the same coin. To try and do the one without taking cognisance of the other, is therefore really a waste of time.

As a result of the world wide environmental or green movement of the late sixties, Government took a very wise decision in the early seventies namely to expand the functions of the then Department of Planning so as to include environmental issues as well. It was therefore re-named the Department of Planning and the Environment. This meant that for the first time in the history of the country a body was created which could look comprehensively at the South African environment.

To my mind the wisdom of this decision lies in the fact that this function was included in those of the national physical planning body where a professional staff of specialists on environmental matters has since made a significant contribution to national and local planning in the country.

However, this combination was broken up in the early eighties when only the physical planning function of that

Department was incorporated into the newly formed Office of the Prime Minister. By virtue of its very nature that Office could only accommodate a small physical planning unit and the remaining components of the former Department of Environmental Planning and Energy were re-allocated to other Departments. The Department of Environment Affairs was subsequently formed comprising the former Departments of Water Affairs and of Forestry as well as the environmental component of the old Department of Environmental Planning and Energy. As a result of this, the very close relationship between physical and environmental issues, has understandably suffered a serious setback.

This does not mean that national physical planning does not take cognisance of the environmental issues any longer or *vice versa*. On the contrary, the very firm link that was established in the days when they were still components of the same department is being strengthened all the time although under much more difficult circumstances. This can be proved by the fact that although it may not be generally known, environmental issues played a very important but indirect role in the formulation of the new regional development strategy and the revision of the National Physical Development Plan which is currently being undertaken, especially in the location of growth points or industrial development points. On the other hand, the National Outdoor Recreation Plan, which is being compiled by the Department of Environment Affairs, uses the National Physical Development Plan as basis.

At the International Conference on Air Pollution in April 1976 Dr A M Coetzee, in a paper entitled "Lugbesoedeling en Gesondheid" made the following statement:

"Lugbesoedeling is 'n probleem wat direk verband hou met digthede – digthede van mense en digthede van nywerhede. Solank meer en meer mense in gemeenskappe saamkom en

waar die werk vir sulke mense ontstaan in nabygeleë bedrywe wat daar gestel word sonder in agneming van behoorlike beginsels van sonering en isolasie, onder andere gebaseer op meteorologiese omstandighede, sal besoedeling toeneem." However this fact does not only apply to air pollution, and is today just as applicable as it was six years ago. Because of the circumstances in Southern Africa where a rather unique First World/Third World situation occurs, it is even more pronounced than in a number of other countries in the world. The industrialised countries appear to have come to grips with the problems of pollution whereas the Third World countries don't really care about pollution because it does not yet really pose a problem. To them development is a priority regardless of the consequences. We in South Africa find ourselves half way between these two conditions with the result that the very fine balance between development on the one hand and protection of the environment on the other is much more difficult to produce and to maintain.

Government has already done a lot to define this balance and to walk the tightrope in a country that is becoming increasingly conscious of the environmental qualities and the potential for tourism and recreation they hold for South Africa.

This consciousness is very much reflected in the newsletters of the Council for the Habitat and a host of other environmental publications that have recently seen the light. When you page through these, you will find that it confirms my original statement that national planning and environmental planning are virtually two sides of the same coin for very few of the articles in those publications deal with one of these two issues only.

To prove that Government is very sensitive about the whole issue, I want to cite but three examples of involvement of the national planning agencies in issues which have an environmental impact. One must realise that the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning is not only responsible for national planning, but also for planning on a regional scale and to a certain extent also on a local scale. This type of planning is however done within the much broader framework of national development priorities and national planning principles so that the environmental issues that come into play, are also evaluated against that background.

The first example is the Knysna/Wilderness/Plettenberg Bay Guide Plan which was approved very recently by the Minister. This Guide Plan had its origins more than ten years ago in the then Department of Planning when it was realised that because of the natural environmental assets of the area and its subsequent tourist potential, it also became one of the most sought after pieces of real estate in the country for development purposes. Of course one would not like to stop all development in the area, but on the other hand one would not like to destroy the natural qualities thereof by exploiting those very factors that make it attractive to tourists and developers. It was therefore decided to draw up a guide plan for the area which was mainly based on finding that balance be-

tween development and conservation. This is just one specific case in which the environmental issues are more pronounced than elsewhere. The same basic principle however applies to all the guide plans that are drawn up in the country.

Another very important example of the relation of national planning to environmental issues is the well known dispute in the Western Cape between conservationists on the one hand, who wish to protect the Noordhoek Valley at all costs and a mining company on the other hand who wish to mine the very rich kaolin deposit of the area. (It is seldom mentioned that township development is an additional factor that has claims on the area concerned). This may sound like a local issue, but the kaolin deposit is a national asset and if mined, could also broaden the economic base of the region which is too dependent on the secondary sector. It must however also be seen in its wider context namely that the economy of the Western Cape is very dependent on the natural beauty of the area and the high agricultural potential. Economic growth therefore, puts increasing demands on the utilisation of land for purposes other than agriculture, tourism or recreation, with the result that those factors that make the Western Cape grow could easily be destroyed because they inherently carry the germ of destruction in themselves. Government has therefore lodged intensive investigations before a final decision was taken on the future utilization of the area. This included reservation of part of the area for mining purposes, another as a natural area, etc.

By the same token the siting of the Koeberg nuclear powerstation, the technology of which is of prime importance to South Africa apart from the fact that we need the power, also posed a host of environmental problems which had to be solved before the go-ahead could be given. This of course applies to all nuclear installations in the country for which a long-term plan based on need and desirability on the one hand and protection of the environment on the other, is absolutely essential. It is therefore not surprising that the Nuclear Energy Act makes specific provision for a representative of the Office of the Prime Minister to be on the Council for Nuclear Safety. This representative should be a person in Central Government who is involved in national physical planning.

Let us now take a look at air pollution specifically. Since 1966 very little physical planning has been undertaken by the national planning agencies, such as the Department of Planning and its successors, without taking due cognisance of the air pollution problems which could occur as a result of development, or which could hamper development as a result of existing pollution levels. The very first reports which were prepared by the then Air Pollution Research Group of the CSIR was a Report on the Ventilation Potential of the Atmosphere over the Richards Bay Area. Since then similar reports have been done for the following areas:

Clayville/Tembisa/Kempton Park,	Bronkhorstspuit,
Compensation,	Nelspruit/Witrivier,
Pretoria,	Sishen and environs

The Vaal Triangle
Middleburg, Tvl.,

East London, and
Mossel Bay/George

The most important and comprehensive study, however, is one that is currently being undertaken in the Eastern Transvaal Highveld where a very high level of pollution occurs as a result of various industrial activities. The total amount of money that has been spent on meso-climate studies since 1973/74 by this Department, is in the order of R1,1 million. In terms of Gross Domestic Product this is not very much, but the results have provided a very important framework for future planning and, amongst others, the location of industrial activities in the country, the most important of these being power-stations.

Many people tend to look at the protection of the environment in a negative way. As a result of studies undertaken in the Eastern Transvaal it was agreed upon between the various parties, i.e. ESCOM, the Department of Health and Welfare and the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning, that for the present a certain part of the area will not be used for the erection of further power-stations, in spite of the fact that ample coal is still available. This may sound negative, but two major advantages flow from this: Firstly, the coal that is available can now be utilised for purposes other than power generation such as export, chemical plants, etc. and in doing so broaden the economic base of the area and thereby assure the long-term economic future of that area. The question always arises; "what can be done with the existing infrastructure such as housing etc. when a power-station closes down." A second very important result is that, because of air pollution factors, one can not only prevent over-concentration in one area but with the co-operation of all concerned stimulate growth in those parts of the country where it is desirable. This of course is one of the major aims of the National Physical Development Plan namely to create a more balanced distribution of population and economic activities in the country. The result of this is that new generation power-stations are being erected and planned in the Northern Free State and the North-Western Transvaal. This of course also has strategic implications.

In conclusion there are a few comments which I would like to make. In the first instance I think we have reached the stage in South Africa where we are looking at environmental issues on a protective basis rather than reacting to existing conditions. The new contract between the Department and the CSIR in respect of air pollution studies is therefore geared towards looking at the pollution potential and the meso-climate of the areas where power-stations are going to be erected in the future although there will be continuous monitoring of pollution levels in the areas where there are already high pollution factors and where studies have already been undertaken. We also have the so-called Growth Points Programme according to which air quality and the ventilation potential of the atmosphere is being studied above those towns and cities which experience the highest growth-rate or

where Government is trying to stimulate industrial development.

The second important point is that too few organisations carry the burden of too many others which contribute to the same problem. For example because of existing levels of pollution ESCOM is being penalised in the Eastern Transvaal by not being allowed to erect more power-stations which of course, from an economic point of view, would have suited them much better. No doubt ESCOM is one of the major contributors to air pollution levels but smouldering mine dumps, existing industries, Black townships utilising coal fired stoves, etc., all add to the high pollution levels. Such non-productive sources such as smouldering mine dumps should not be tolerated. The price the country has to pay is too high to afford such luxuries and I am of the opinion that those parties involved should also make a greater contribution to keeping pollution levels down. It is however, not enough. ESCOM has made a significant contribution to air pollution research as such and I think that a joint effort by private enterprise in this respect is highly desirable.

Government is gradually mustering its forces to co-ordinate air pollution research in the country. Representatives from the various agencies that undertake research in the field of air pollution such as the Transvaal Provincial Administration, the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning, the CSIR, the Department of Environment Affairs and the Department of Health and Welfare, meet regularly on an informal basis to discuss research in this field. This of course has the effect that the Co-operative Scientific Programmes of the CSIR can bring their long-term air pollution planning in line with national planning objectives; that the National Physical Research Laboratory at the CSIR can determine its priorities for air quality/pollution studies on a long term basis and that the Committee for Weather Climate and Atmosphere of the Department of Environment Affairs can fulfil its co-ordinating function more effectively.

Finally, one wonders whether the time is not ripe to take another hard look at the possibility of integrating the Environment Division of the Department of Environment Affairs once again with the activities of the Physical Planning Branch of the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning. Now that the latter Branch is no longer part of the Office of the Prime Minister, there is no reason why it cannot be expanded so as to include an environmental section as well. The danger always exists that in the Department of Environmental Affairs the small Environment Division can easily be engulfed by the massive executive directorates of Water Affairs and Forestry and disappear completely. This is just a personal thought, but one which should be given serious attention because, as I stated right at the beginning, national physical planning and environmental issues go hand in hand and are virtually inseparable.