

CEO'S REPORT

**DEAR WESSA
BOARD, MEMBERS,
VOLUNTEERS, STAFF,
PARTNERS, FUNDERS
AND FRIENDS.**

There are moments in the life of an organisation when its past, present, and future seem to meet in one place. For WESSA, our centenary is such a moment.



One hundred years ago, people who understood that South Africa's natural heritage could not protect itself chose to organise, speak up, and act. Their efforts contributed to the establishment of the National Parks Board, now SANParks, and the proclamation of the Kruger National Park.

In the decades that followed, WESSA advocated for the protection of some of our country's most important natural places, became a founding member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, pioneered environmental education, and helped generations of citizens understand that caring for the Earth is not the responsibility of a few specialists, but the shared work of us all.

This history gives us every reason to be proud, but a centenary cannot simply be a celebration of survival. Longevity, on its own, is not impact.

This year reminded me that WESSA's legacy does not live only in archives, publications, or protected landscapes. It lives in what people are doing today: in young people planting their first trees and discovering their power to create change; in

The true measure of WESSA's first century is our ability to remain useful to the people and places we serve: to turn concern into courage, knowledge into action, and citizens into environmental stewards.

communities restoring degraded land and defending the natural places that sustain them; in members and volunteers challenging harmful development, clearing invasive plants, and monitoring rivers; and in businesses and municipalities choosing to manage their environmental impact more responsibly.

Across our programmes, WESSA continued to translate environmental knowledge into practical citizen action:

Our schools and youth work reached learners, educators, and communities across the country. Our coastal programmes strengthened stewardship of beaches, high-biodiversity coastlines, and marine environments.

Green Key demonstrated that responsible tourism can be both environmentally credible and economically relevant. At uMngeni Valley Nature Reserve, renewed partnerships, volunteerism, and ecological management continued the restoration of a place that has shaped generations of environmental leaders.

These achievements happen in different places and through different programmes, but they are connected by one simple idea: lasting environmental change happens when people are given the knowledge, opportunity, and confidence to act.

One achievement this year holds particular meaning for me. At Blaauwberg Nature Reserve, WESSA launched South Africa's first coastal environmental education signage incorporating Braille. Its significance extends far beyond the signs themselves.

They represent the kind of organisation we must continue becoming, one that recognises that nature belongs to everyone.

Environmental education cannot transform society if people are excluded from it. Inclusion cannot be an optional addition to our work; it must shape how we design programmes, build partnerships, and define impact. In that moment, we did more than share information about the coast.

We affirmed that every person should have the opportunity to experience, understand, and care for the natural world.

As proud as I am of what WESSA delivered this year, I am equally conscious that a strong mission requires a strong organisation behind it.

We clarified our purpose as **enabling citizen action for environmental stewardship** and deepened our strategy around climate literacy and action, biodiversity and habitat integrity, reducing pollution, and long-term financial sustainability.

We also completed a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Framework that will help us move beyond reporting what we do towards understanding what changes because of our work. The next century will demand more than good intentions. It will require evidence, discipline, collaboration, and the courage to make clear choices. We must learn from what succeeds and what does not, demonstrate impact to our communities, partners, and funders, and ensure that the resources entrusted to WESSA are directed where they can make the greatest difference.

WESSA has never been merely an organisation. It is a movement of people. Its history was shaped by volunteers who acted long before citizen action became common language, by educators who turned landscapes into classrooms, by scientists who brought evidence into public debate, and by members who refused to accept that environmental degradation was inevitable. That same spirit sustains us today.

To our members and volunteers, thank you for keeping WESSA rooted in communities and connected to the places where change must happen. To our partners and funders, thank you for trusting us to turn resources into meaningful and lasting impact. To our Board, thank you for your stewardship, guidance, and courage to ask the difficult questions that responsible governance requires. And to our staff, thank you for bringing your knowledge, resilience, and heart to this mission every day.

We must resist the temptation to look backwards for too long. We honour those who came before us not by standing still beside their achievements, but by showing the same courage in our own time.

The environmental challenges facing South Africa today are different in scale and complexity from those confronted in 1926. Climate disruption, biodiversity loss, pollution, and inequality increasingly intersect. Yet the central question remains familiar: will people choose to care, and will that caring become action? I believe the answer can be yes.

As we celebrate 100 years, we must resist the temptation to look backwards for too long. We honour those who came before us not by standing still beside their achievements, but by showing the same courage in our own time.

Our roots are deep. Our present is alive with impact. And our next 100 years will be determined by the choices we make now. We must build a WESSA that is more inclusive, courageous, evidence-led, and connected to the people and places we serve. Let us be proud of our history without becoming captive to it. And let us ensure that, a century from now, those who inherit this organisation can say that when our moment came, we did not look away.

With pride in our past and hope for our future,

**We educated.
We advocated.
We acted.**

Cindy- Lee Cloete

WESSA CEO

