

Preface: Background to the *WET-Management Series*

The need for wetland rehabilitation in South Africa is compelling: loss and degradation of wetlands have been great and national policy and legislation provide clear direction and support for rehabilitation. However, rehabilitating wetlands is often complex because wetlands and their links with people are complex (e.g. through the ways that people use wetlands and the different benefits that people receive from the ecosystem services that wetlands supply). Thus a series of tools has been developed to assist those wishing to undertake wetland rehabilitation in a well-informed and effective way (Box 1P). These tools were developed as part of a comprehensive nine-year research programme on wetland management which was initiated in 2003 by the Water Research Commission (WRC) and a range of partners that examines wetland rehabilitation, wetland health and integrity and the sustainable use of wetlands. The rehabilitation component, which was co-funded by the WRC and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, through the Working for Wetlands (WfWetlands) programme, was prioritised to take place first because of the need to provide a firm, scientific and technical foundation for the extensive rehabilitation work already under way. The Working for Wetlands programme is a national initiative that seeks to promote the protection, rehabilitation and wise use of wetlands in South Africa. As part of this initiative, WfWetlands has a national programme for the rehabilitation of wetlands, including a structured process of prioritising rehabilitation sites and supporting their rehabilitation. At the same time, however, it is acknowledged that sustainable use of wetlands in the long term can be achieved only through the dedicated participation of civil society, whose wetland interests may have a strong local focus. Thus the tools have been developed in such a way that they can be applied outside of the Working for Wetlands programme, and without having to engage the process of national or provincial prioritisation should the user not desire to do so. Even so, the tools encourage local wetland rehabilitation efforts to strengthen links with the national initiative and the opportunity these provide for fruitful partnerships. The series consists of a roadmap, two background documents, eight tools and an evaluation of the success of six individual projects (Box 1P). From Table 1P it can be seen that some of the tools (e.g. *WET-RehabMethods*) are designed to be used by those dealing specifically with wetland rehabilitation and its technical requirements. Other tools (e.g. *WETHealth*) have much wider application such as assessing impacts associated with current and future human activities in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or assessing the Present Ecological State (PES) of a wetland in an Ecological Reserve Determination (ERD). One can locate the tools in terms of some basic 'who', 'what', 'where' and 'how' questions that any team undertaking wetland rehabilitation should be asking (Table 2P). Furthermore, each of the tools can be used individually, but there are close links between them (Figure 1P).