

Summary of *WET-Prioritise*

There are tens of thousands of wetlands in South Africa, and in situations where there are numerous possible points of intervention or study, prioritisation is required when the necessary resources are insufficient to target all sites simultaneously (Leibowitz, 2002). Prioritisation procedures thus allow for identification of the highest-priority sites for intervention, so that the limited resources can be directed most appropriately and with the maximum impact. The word 'prioritisation' implies ranking or valuing one above another such that those with a higher rank or value are by definition regarded as more important than those with a lower rank or value. The ranking or value ascribed per resource or wetland unit would be highly dependent on the objectives of the prioritisation process being undertaken. The *WET-Prioritise* tool is a suite of procedures for identifying and prioritising catchments and wetlands which match particular objectives, be they for rehabilitation, conservation or monitoring activities. The procedures provide an iterative, spatially-nested approach to collecting data, screening and prioritising and verifying the identified wetlands or catchment areas. The actual prioritisation process adopts a seven-step approach:

Step 1: Define the aims and objectives of the prioritisation project

Step 2: Identify the spatial extent of the study area (the spatial scale of the assessment determines which specific information and protocols can be used)

Step 3: Collate available information

Step 4: Develop prioritisation criteria

Step 5: Screen for candidate catchments

Step 6: Prioritise catchments

Step 7: Assess the potential of prioritised catchments to meet the objectives

These seven steps can be used at different spatial scales. At a national or provincial scale they can be used to prioritise tertiary level catchments, at a regional scale they can be used to prioritise quaternary catchments and at a local spatial scale they can be used to prioritise individual wetlands, or clusters of wetlands. This prioritisation process can be done in an iterative manner, starting at a national level and working through the seven steps, then proceeding in the same manner through the seven steps at the regional level, and then using the same steps at a local level as well. Although the procedure is presented as a largely top-down approach (i.e. starting at a national or provisional level), the design of the prioritisation procedure is such that it allows multiple points of entry, which depend on the spatial scale of operation. Thus, whereas national or provincial bodies (government departments or NGOs) that operate at the regional to national scale may focus on prioritisation of quaternary catchments within a focal tertiary catchment, more localised government sectors (e.g. municipalities) and specific conservation groups or landowners may initiate prioritisation procedures at a more localised level, such as prioritising individual wetland systems within a focal quaternary catchment. These seven steps of the *WET-Prioritise* tool provide a framework for rationalising the many possible sites for wetland rehabilitation or other activities in order that priority areas for intervention (i.e. those that would maximally benefit) are identified. The *WET-Prioritise* procedure has application in wetland rehabilitation, wetland conservation and wetland reserve projects. Case studies for a variety of projects demonstrating the applicability of the tool for a variety of projects are provided to illustrate the application of the tool.