

6.1 Coastal Population

Humans have lived on the coast of KZN for millennia. Evidence from archaeological deposits found in Border Cave of the Lebombo mountains reveal Stone Age people harvesting marine fish, shells, dolphins and whales up to 100 000 years ago. More recently, Iron Age people created coastal middens dated 290AD, that to this day yield shards of their pottery amid heaps of shells, reflecting their harvesting of mussels and other coastal resources.

Since those historic times, the affinity for the KZN coast and its resources has grown and matured into a human demographic phenomenon. Worldwide, coastal populations are amongst the most concentrated, largely as a result of people seeking a more favourable climate, the availability of fertile land and the proximity to marine resources for food security.^{1;2} As a result, coastal areas have a global average population density of 80 persons per square kilometre, twice that of the world's

average population density.³ Internationally, this translates into approximately three billion people living within 200 km of the coast. Based on present growth trends, it is anticipated that this number will increase substantially in years to come.³

An estimated third of South Africa's population lives within 100 km of the coast,⁴ and this figure is steadily increasing.

The higher numbers of people residing in coastal areas is driven by a range of factors, including natural population growth, in-migration and resettlement, as well as seasonal changes in population.

Natural population growth

Natural growth in South Africa's population has been progressively moderate from just under 2% per annum in the

KZN coastal zone experiences pressure from its coastal population.



Photo: Kierran Allen



1960s to around 1% in recent years and an even lower 0.7% for KZN. While there are complex underlying reasons for this slower growth, it signals a more modest and sustainable population in future years. Nevertheless, South Africa's population reached an estimated 50.6 million in 2011, with nearly a quarter (12.1 million people) living in KZN.⁵

Despite a lower birth rate, KZN's population has remained significantly higher than the other coastal provinces,⁵ with the population disproportionately skewed towards the coast so that 56% of the people reside within the five coastal districts.⁶ This places additional pressure on resources and ecosystem services.

In-migration

In a number of developing countries, including South Africa, there is a net migration of people from inland areas to coastal cities and settlements.⁷ Between 2001 and 2011, more than 250 000 people moved to and settled in KZN. The majority of these "migrants" were from the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and foreign countries in search of employment opportunities.⁵

This demographic change is further accentuated by the migration of people to urban areas. In South Africa the movement out of rural areas is partially a response to the state-imposed demographics of the Apartheid era where people were compelled to settle in rural homelands. By 2001, an estimated 58% of South Africa's total population was already resident in urban areas,⁸ with a number of these areas being located in the coastal zone.

Tourism

The demands, as well as pressures exerted by the resident coastal populations on the coastal environment are exacerbated by the seasonal influx of tourists to the coast. With some one million visitors to KZN annually there is considerable increased pressure on infrastructure, from roads and shopping complexes to waste disposal, beach amenities and access to coastal resources. For example, the population of the relatively rural KwaDukuza Municipality can increase by 20% during the December holiday period.

While these short term seasonal migrations to the KZN coast generate a welcome source of tourism revenue, the coastal infrastructure is often ill-equipped to deal with the additional

pressures. These include increased waste production and associated pollution and higher demand for water, power and natural resources in coastal areas.

The seasonal influx of tourists also generates a demand for specialised development and infrastructure such as hotels, resorts, marinas, beach facilities, restaurants, golf courses, etc.⁹ Significantly, such facilities are invariably located at or near the coast and may impose additional environmental burdens. Thus, while tourism is a cornerstone of the economic development vision for the province of KZN, there is a compelling need to ensure that the additional visitor pressures are considered in development planning.

Effects of population growth

Changes in the size, composition and distribution of human populations within coastal regions can affect the condition and functioning of coastal systems. Changing land-use practices, over-exploitation of resources, the destruction of natural habitats, increased pollution and sedimentation are all examples of population-induced pressures.³ A further notable impact is that of "ribbon development" where the demand for sea vistas and beachfront properties creates a linear development parallel to the coast. These population-induced changes can in turn place at risk the very population being sustained by the coast and its resources.

Population development pressures on the coast do not all originate within the coastal zone. Environmental impacts that originate inland, such as the damming of rivers, deforestation, waste discharge, pesticide and fertilizer contamination of water, can all affect the downstream functioning of the coast and, ultimately, the coastal populations – often disproportionately.³

Typical of coastal zones elsewhere in the world, the coastal population of KZN has been increasing, driven by the demand for access to the coast and its resources. Beach tourism and coastal development are key socio-economic drivers of the future. However, the scale of population growth needs to be tempered if negative effects on the coastal environment are to be minimised and sustainable benefits maximised. ■

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