

Ugu Lwethu - Our Coast. A profile of coastal KwaZulu-Natal

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1.1 Overview

The coast is a cherished environment for human settlement, but it is also an environment in which ecological diversity, human activity and socio-economic influences are interdependent and interact.¹

The average population density of coastal areas is about 80 persons per square kilometre (*Section 6.1*), which is twice the world's average population density.² It is predicted that the numbers will continue to grow substantially, being driven by natural population growth coupled with migration to the coast, tourism, recreation, residential and industrial development. A growing population puts the coastal environment under pressure from urban encroachment, pollution, water extraction and over-exploitation of resources.

This raises concerns about sustainability, exacerbated by the potential effects of climate change, with coastal environments highlighted as an "area of particular concern" by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).³ It is anticipated that coastal environments will be exposed to increased erosion, sea-level rise (*Section 9.5*), intensification of tropical and extra-tropical cyclones, and increased flooding and wash-over events.^{3;4}

The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) coast is no exception to these trends. It is a special and appealing place to live, and to visit as a tourist, offering attractive beaches and a variety of recreational activities, fishing, diving, a year-round warm climate with comfortable seawater temperatures, and

Leven Point, KZN north coast.



Photo: Stuart Dunlop



accessibility from other parts of South Africa. However, the pressures on, and threats to, the ecological functioning and resources of the KZN coast resulting from coastal development, requires careful management.

The need for wise planning and the effective management of the coast has long been recognized, with policy makers worldwide defining policies and legislation to address the problems in the coastal zone.⁵ Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) is now a globally recognised and widely used approach to the management of the coast and its resources. South Africa, having followed global trends for coastal management, recognised the need for dedicated legislation in order to protect this environmental, social and economic asset. The *Integrated Coastal Management Act (Act No. 24 of 2008)* (ICM Act) was promulgated at the end of 2009, but coastal authorities are now faced with the implementation of this legislation (*Section 10.2*), and the management of a highly complex environment that is subject to natural and anthropogenic pressure. However, in order for ICM initiatives to be effective, both the people who manage the coast and those who use it need a better understanding of the value and management intricacies of coastal resources.

About this publication

Our KZN coast is a unique environment that embraces a range of ecosystems and species. It is also a zone of varied and intense human activity that requires planning and management in order to ensure sustainability for future generations. The aim of this book is to bring these disparate worlds together, by providing a broad but factual overview of the natural features and resources of the KZN coast, and the many ways in which they are being utilised. It highlights the value of the KZN coast for all users, and emphasises wise approaches to be adopted that will protect this much-cherished coast and its resources for current and future generations.

This book is partitioned into a number of chapters and sections, to help the reader focus on specific components. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and overview of the coastal zone. Chapter 2 deals with the physical coastal environment, its climate, geology and oceanography. Chapter 3 outlines the coastal and marine ecosystems found in the KZN coastal zone, their uniqueness and importance. The next chapter (Chapter 4) provides an overview of the coastal and marine diversity found along the KZN coast, their habitats and distribution, while Chapter 5 focuses on migratory species. Chapter 6 looks at the human dimension within the coastal zone, its population and associated infrastructure. Chapters 7 and 8 highlight the socio-economic and commercial utilisation of coastal resources, respectively. Chapter 9 is an overview of the current pressures on, and threats to the coastal environment. Lastly, Chapter 10 deals with various national and international mechanisms that have been developed to manage this unique resource.

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