

Beach project to provide jobs for local youth

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The Department of Tourism has entered a three year partnership with Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) to train 200 beach stewards to enhance tourism facilities and services at 50 mostly Blue Flag beaches in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape.

Speaking at the launch event at Marina Beach on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal today, Minister Derek Hanekom lauded the R40 million programme which will advance responsible tourism along the country's approximately 3 000km coastline.

"I would like to congratulate the 200 beach ambassadors. We see the programme as a start to make our attractions even greater. We aim for this programme to help us double our number of Blue Flag beaches and in the process create more jobs opportunities," stated Minister Hanekom.

The Blue Flag Project will train 200 youth from low-income, coastal households in the National Certificate in Environmental Education Training and Development Practices NQF 5 specialising in Tourism. The training will run over a 28 month period and will be complemented by practical work experience.

The beach stewards will provide local member municipalities with adequate infrastructural support to maintain the required high standards of safety, environmental management, water quality and environmental education at Blue Flag sites, as well as assist other beaches to attain this prestigious status. As part of this, they will keep beaches clean and safe, provide beach goers with information and protect the coastal environment.

The KwaZulu-Natal MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environment Affairs, Mr Sihle Zikalala emphasised how critical Blue Flag sites are to tourism. "If you are a province such as KwaZulu-Natal which is blessed with tourism and are preferred by both international and local tourists, then you know what is at stake to uphold a Blue Flag status," said MEC Zikalala.

The Mayor of Ray Nkonyeni Municipality, Ms Nomusa Mqwebu, welcomed the initiative that will provide opportunities for coastal youth. "Blue Flag status is the ideal catalyst to improve tourism, both domestic and international. A number of studies indicated, travellers are no longer content with sunshine and fun at the beach; they also want to know that they are getting value for money by placing a premium on those beaches which are of the highest standard," stated Mayor Mqwebu.

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