The South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (SAIAB) and the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the intention of collaborating on key water-related conservation projects in the country. SAIAB is the national institute for aquatic biodiversity and is a world-renowned centre of aquatic research, specifically of fish research. SAIAB is focused on the output of valuable research and information that managers and conservationists can effectively implement. The EWT is a local NGO that implements high-impact conservation action across southern and East Africa. The need for evidence-based conservation in the freshwater biome is huge and this is precisely why this partnership has been forged.

SAIABs' managing director Dr Angus Paterson, and principal scientist Dr Olaf Weyl, met with manager of the EWT's Source to Sea Programme, Bridget Corrigan and field officer, Christine Coppinger on the 5th March this year to discuss existing and future collaborations on freshwater and marine conservation projects. The pilot collaborative project is the Amathole Freshwater Species Conservation Project (AFSCP) (http://www.ewt.org.za/SOURCETSEA/amatolo.html) in the Eastern Cape. This project has benefited from research conducted by Dr Bruce Ellender and Dr Olaf Weyl of SAIAB on the impacts of alien fish invasions on indigenous fishes in the Keiskamma upper catchments. The conservation recommendations emanating from this research are being implemented by the AFSCP.

To address water security and poverty challenges, the AFSCP will establish natural resource conservation through the generation of a water-linked green-economy in the Amathole region of the Eastern Cape. The two key objectives running concurrently are firstly to improve natural resource protection and secondly to empower communities to value the resources under their custodianship and to enter the green economy. Being a biodiversity hotspot and a high water yield zone, this area is extremely important.

A primary focus of the project is the removal of alien vegetation from sensitive water source areas which are the lifeblood of numerous river systems within the Eastern Cape Province. Many of the affected stream environments are essential for the provision of freshwater to the surrounding communities while also being important habitats for a number of threatened species. Five threatened freshwater-dependent species occur within the Amathole: two fishes (Border barb *Barbus trevelyani*, Eastern Cape rocky *Sandelia bainsii*), a damselfly (Amathole malachite *Chlorolestes apricans*) and two amphibians (Amathole toad *Vandijkophrynus amatolicus*, Hogsback chirping frog *Anhydrophryne rattrayi*). Currently there is no formal protection of these species or, to a large extent, their habitat.
In collaboration with SAIAB, conservation plans are currently being developed for the Border barb and the Eastern Cape rocky within the Keiskamma catchment. Since research indicates that these species are largely affected by habitat destruction and degradation, rehabilitation and stewardship work with communities are some of the key conservation actions being implemented. This illustrates the effectiveness of the collaboration on conservation efforts between research institutions such as SAIAB and conservation organisations like the EWT.

End

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SAIAB is a national research facility of the National Research Foundation. Despite its remote situation in the rural Eastern Cape, SAIAB (www.saiab.ac.za) serves as a hub for national and international scientific engagement on African aquatic biodiversity across the full spectrum of aquatic environments. SAIAB focuses on platform provision, molecular biology and systematics, understanding environmental and climate change, research for sustainability and training future aquatic scientists.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (www.ewt.org.za) is a non-governmental, non-profit, conservation organisation, founded in 1973 and operating throughout southern and East Africa. The EWT is dedicated to conserving threatened species and ecosystems to the benefit of all the people and it does this by initiating research; initiating and implementing conservation action programmes; and mitigating threats facing species diversity by supporting sustainable natural resource management. The EWT furthermore communicates the principles of sustainable living through awareness programmes to the broadest possible constituency for the benefit of the region.