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EARTH OBSERVATION

SA strengthening its earth observation capacity

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The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has launched two interlinked initiatives that are expected to boost and strengthen South Africa's earth observation capacity.

These initiatives include the South African Earth Observation Strategy (Saeos) and the Egagasini Node for Marine Offshore Systems, which will form part of the South African Observation Network (Saeon).

Science and Technology Minister **Mosibudi Mangena** comments that the launch of these earth observation initiatives comes amidst a growing awareness of the importance of a system of geospatial infrastructure to coordinate the collection, assimilation and dissemination of earth observation data to support environmental

decision-making processes in South Africa.

In addition, the DST established both Saeos and Saeon as part of its engagement with the international community in promoting an integrated global earth observation system.

Mangena explains that Saeos has been instituted to coordinate all of South Africa's earth observation activities and to establish a comprehensive global monitoring system that will enable end-users to access a vast quantity of near-real-time information on changes in the earth's land, oceans, atmosphere and biosphere via a single web portal.

In addition Saeos has been developed to link South Africa's existing earth observation capacities to complementary capabilities in neighbouring countries and to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

Mangena adds that this initiative will greatly benefit from the envisaged establishment of a South African Space Agency.

The other scheme initiated by the DST concerns the Egagasini Node for marine-offshore systems. Mangena explains that this node will use South Africa's geographical advantage with regard to the Southern Oceans to garner information to inform climate change studies across the globe.

Along with science councils, universities and research organisations, the South African Data Centre for Oceanography and the African Node for the Ocean Bio-geographic Information System will be prominent participants in the SAEON Egagasini Node.

Saeon, of which the Egagasini node forms an integral part, is an in situ earth observation network concentrating on the establishment and maintenance of environmental observatories linked by an information management network to serve as observation, research and education platforms for long-term studies of ecosystems.

The observatories deal with areas such as water resources monitoring, land use and land cover, disturbance regimes in terms of fires and droughts, biodiversity and human health and security.

Saeon head Johan Pauw tells Engineering News that these two initiatives will be inter-linked in that Saeon will be a component of Saeos but will not be totally absorbed by the new strategy.

Pauw states that within the Saeos framework, Saeon aims to be comprehensive in scope by covering terrestrial, atmospheric and oceanic systems, inclusive of recent past environmental conditions that may be inferred from geographical and paleontological observations.

Edited by: **Martin Zhuwakinyu**

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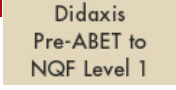
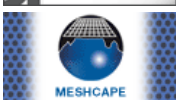
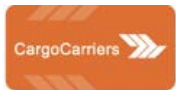
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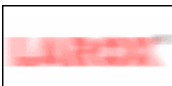
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