Print

SA boosts Earth observation

10/12/2007 12:39 - (SA)

Cape Town - The South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON) has improved the country's Earth observation capabilities, to ensure better management of existing resources and to promote sustainable development, according to government news agency BuaNews.

Earth observation is the use of satellites to gather various types of data, including on land usage, oceans and atmospheric conditions, reports Southafrica.info.

The Department of Science and Technology said recently, it has also developed the South African Earth Observation Strategy (SAEOS) as a framework for co-ordinating and integrating the country's existing earth observation capabilities.

The strategy is also aimed at linking existing capabilities with complementary capabilities in neighbouring countries and to the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS).

"South Africa needs a system of geospatial infrastructure to better co-ordinate the collection, assimilation and dissemination of Earth observation data in order to support policy, decision-making, economic growth and sustainable development," Science and Technology Minister Mosibudi Mangena said.

He was addressing delegates at the 4th Ministerial Summit of the Intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations (GEO), which took place at the Cape Town International Convention Centre last week.

"This is where the SAEOS and SAEON will play a key role. By enabling us to understand our planet better, and provide the basis for evidence-based decision-making by policymakers, civil society and the private sector."

According to the department, the two programmes were established as part of its engagement with the international community, in promoting an integrated global earth observation system.

Long-term (30-year plus) monitoring

SAEON is in the process of establishing "nodes" in each of the major biomes of South Africa, which are aimed at establishing long-term (30-year plus) monitoring of environmental indicators.

The Egagasini Node for marine-offshore systems will use South Africa's geographical advantage with regard to the Southern Oceans to garner information to inform climate change studies across the globe and fisheries management locally.

"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 geological and palaeontological observations," SAEON head Johan Pauw said.

"SAEON's scientific design is continuously refined to be responsive to emerging environmental issues and corresponds largely with the GEO societal benefit areas," he explained.

Minister Mangena also praised the contributions made by the Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS), the international mechanism charged with the co-ordination of the international civil space-borne missions designed to observe and study the earth.

Earlier this month South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) took over as chair of the committee, a move that Mangena said would provide the country's current and future space activities with global exposure in the space community.

This would further boost our access to world-class technologies in the area of satellite earth

observation.

"It will also provide an opportunity to foster partnerships with international space agencies and their partners to promote technology skills transfer and access to international research funding instruments," he said. - BuaNews