

# Greenie making history

By Cdr Adri Liebenberg, Acting SSO Environmental Services

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Lt Renier van Wyk was instrumental in launching the most important environmental initiative in the recent history of the DOD. This young SA Air Force officer was the first environmental member to be deployed on a foreign mission, namely in OPERATION TRITON IV, as part of the African Mission in Support of Elections in the Comoros (AMISEC) in 2006. During this peace support operation the DOD acted as the leading nation in this African Union (AU) mission by providing peace support during the first democratic elections in the Union of the Comoros.

As the leading defence force the DOD was obligated to ensure that all deployed members adhered to all international, national and local (Comoros) environmental legislation applicable to the mission as well as to ensure that all environmental practices and policies were adhered to. Therefore, in order to adhere to this obligation Joint Operations requested the services of an environmental member for the planning and execution of environmental issues to be considered during this mission. "It was the first time in the history of any South African deployment that an environmental officer formed part of the deployment team, and not only for regular inspection audits," says Lt Van Wyk.

Renier van Wyk was born in 1977 in the Strand near Cape Town. After completing his matric with exemption in 1995, he joined the SA Air Force

in 1996 and was appointed as the Environmental Assistant at Air Force Base Overberg (previously Test Flight and Development Centre) in 1996. In 1998 he was appointed as the Environmental Manager at AFB Overberg and attended the officers' formative training at the SA Air Force College in 2004. After successful completion of the course he was promoted to Lieutenant.

At this base, Lt van Wyk is responsible for managing and maintaining the Environmental Management System (EMS) in accordance with the International Standards Organisations' Standard for Environmental Management, ISO 14001 for continued South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) accreditation. This accreditation is necessary for the base to maintain its status as centre of excellence in national and international flight-testing. He is therefore well trained in all aspects of environmental management, including ISO 14001. In 2006 he also qualified as an ISO 14001 auditor.

During the deployment to the Comoros Lt Van Wyk was responsible for ensuring that all members on deployment (including members from other nations) were made aware of their environmental responsibility by ensuring total integration with the deployment team. Furthermore, he had to ensure that

the assistance, co-operation and backing from top management were obtained in order to ensure that all environmental policies, strategies and procedures were implemented successfully and adhered to down to the lowest level. It was imperative that Lt Van Wyk participated in the planning phase to ensure that all environmental planning, procedures and strategies could be communicated and incorporated into the mission prior to the deployment.

Through this initiative Lt Van Wyk paved the way for future deployments of environmental personnel and achieved awareness with regard to environmental responsibility, adherence to best environmental practices and obtained environmental equipment for use in future deployments and exercises. In addition, the local community was taught ways and means of preserving their environment in a sustainable way for tourism, which is the only source of income for the islanders. Furthermore, he ensured that the AMISEC mission (particularly iro the RSA) could and would not be held responsible for any negative influences on the natural environment utilised in the Comoros, but would rather have a positive output with regard to the sustainable management of military impacts on the environment, and that this would be communicated to the media and public.

For this achievement Lt Van Wyk was awarded the 2006 Conservamus Floating Trophy for Environmental Services in the DOD at the award function that was presented at AFB Ysterplaat on 7 June 2007. For his contribution to the maintenance of the EMS at AFB Overberg the unit was also awarded the 2006 SA National Parks Floating Trophy for Integrated Environmental Management Systems (IEMS) in the DOD.

*\* The deployment of environmental personnel is in compliance with the Environmental Considerations during Military Operations programme, which was featured in the April 2007 edition of SA Soldier.*



Lt Renier van Wyk was deployed as the Environmental Officer in the Comoros in 2006.