

# Ward delimitation for the 2005/2006 local elections

South Africa is gearing up for the next local elections, which are to be held between December 2005 and March 2006. It is expected that the election date will be announced by the Minister of Provincial and Local Government in the second half of 2005.

Unlike national and provincial elections, the electoral system for local elections includes both proportional representation (PR), where a registered voter casts a vote for a party, and ward representation, where a registered voter casts a vote for a ward candidate to represent him or her in the municipal council.

Preparations for local elections are much more intensive than for national and provincial elections and already commenced in 2003.

At a local level 237 different elections are held: one in each of the six metropolitan areas and one in each of the 231 local municipal areas. This is also unlike national and provincial elections, where 10 different elections are held – one for Parliamentary representatives and one to elect representatives for each of the nine provincial legislatures.

Local elections also affect the daily lives of people more directly as elected councillors, especially ward councillors, are involved in the daily lives of people requiring municipal services such as water, electricity, sanitation, cemeteries, municipal roads, etc.

Planning for, and the conduct of national and provincial elections, are the sole responsibility of Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), while local elections, with their dual system of PR and ward representation, require the involvement of

## key points

- The process of demarcating ward boundaries has begun for the municipal election in 2005/2006.
- Draft ward boundaries will be published for comment in August.
- Municipalities that have more than seven councillors must be divided into wards.

another important constitutional institution, namely the Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB).

### The Municipal Demarcation Board's role

The MDB plays a pivotal role in the ward delimitation process. All metropolitan municipal areas and all local municipalities that have more than seven councillors must be divided into wards from which ward councillors are elected to represent people in the ward in the municipal council.

The MDB, together with other role players, started the planning process for the 2005/2006 local elections in 2003. A technical committee was set up between the MDB, the IEC and the national department responsible for local government to deal with technical boundary issues. Geographic information systems are employed in the technical processes.

Furthermore, the MDB set up a committee on which provinces, SALGA and other key stakeholders are represented.

Consultation between members of these committees takes place through formal meetings of all members, regular one-on-one consultation and through electronic communication.

## Numbers of councillors

Due to the national and provincial elections held on 14 April 2004 and the general hesitancy about proceeding with important and contentious projects such as ward delimitation during an election period, preparations for the local elections have been delayed to a certain extent.

However, on 22 April 2004, the Minister of Provincial and Local Government set the ball rolling by publishing the formulae for the number of councillors. The formulae are based on the division of the IEC's certified national common voters roll, as on 20 February 2004, into municipal segments.

It was expected that all provinces would have determined their numbers of councillors before 14 May 2004. However, this did not take place. Only Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape gazetted the numbers of councillors for their provinces in May and the other provinces followed in June 2004.

As a result of these delays the MDB had to change its delimitation strategy. Instead of following a national approach, the strategy has been changed to cascade the ward delimitation process on a provincial basis. This was necessary as the number of wards is dependent on the number of councillors. Fifty per cent of municipal councillors represent wards.

Provided that no other unforeseen delays occur, the MDB remains committed to finalising all ward boundaries early next year so that wards can be handed over to the IEC for the electoral process. This entails, among others things, the registration of voters, political parties and ward candidates and logistical preparations for the 237 local elections.

## Time frames

Taking into consideration the broad time frames in the table below, the MDB is working under extreme pressure.

The time frames reflect the MDB's commitment to ensure maximum public participation. Provisional ward boundaries are prepared as a first step, taking into consideration

**Table 1: Time frames for local elections**

| Time frame                | Action  |
|---------------------------|---|
| May/June 2004             | MECs publish the number of councillors for each municipality. Municipal Demarcation Board (MDB) prepares the first set of draft technical boundaries and consults the public.         |
| July/August 2004          | MDB considers public inputs, reviews the ward boundaries and publishes them for further public scrutiny and comments.   |
| September/December 2004   | Ward boundaries are further reviewed by the MDB and, if necessary, public hearings are held.  |
| January/March 2005        | MDB publishes ward boundaries in provincial Gazettes for objections, consider all objections and provides the finalised ward boundaries to the Independent Election Commission (IEC). |
| April/November 2005       | The IEC prepares for the 2005/2006 local elections.   |
| December 2005/ March 2006 | Local elections are held, on a date to be determined by the Minister of Provincial and Local Government.  |

the criteria provided for in the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998. A key element of these criteria is that all wards within a municipality must have approximately the same number of voters, with the maximum allowable deviation being 15%.

To prevent a massive re-registration of voters, the MDB is also assisting the IEC by using voting districts, as far as possible, as building blocks for wards. The provisional draft ward boundaries are then published for public participation. Upon receipt of public inputs, the provisional draft ward boundaries are reviewed and a second set of boundaries is published for further comments.

Should further consultation be deemed necessary, public hearings will also be arranged by the MDB to allow the public to give verbal evidence in support of their proposals for ward boundaries.

A final opportunity for public participation is

allowed when ward boundaries are published in the relevant provincial *Gazettes* for objections. It is anticipated that this will happen early next year.

Any person, institution or organisation is welcome to submit comments on the MDB's draft ward boundaries, or to submit alternative proposals for ward boundaries for consideration by the MDB.

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**Draft ward boundaries and other relevant information are available on the MDB's website ([www.demarcation.org.za](http://www.demarcation.org.za)), or can be obtained from the MDB's Help Desk ([info@demarcation.org.za](mailto:info@demarcation.org.za) or fax 012-3422480.)**