



## INTERNET ARTICLE

### Minister Mchunu urges sector collaboration to change the perception of river pollution in South Africa

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In a bid to address the alarming levels of pollution in the Vaal River, Minister Senzo Mchunu of the Department of Water and Sanitation recently led a Workshop with Gauteng and Free State Municipalities to address the high levels of pollution in the Vaal River on Friday, 12 April 2024 at the Emerald Resort and Casino in Vanderbijlpark.

The Upper Vaal River has been facing significant challenges due to high levels of invasive plant growth, a direct result of poor water quality caused by the discharge of untreated or raw sewage into the basin. This has not only had a detrimental impact on the environment but also on the health and well-being of communities who rely on the river for various purposes.

Various stakeholders from the water sector were present at the event, including the Executive Mayors of Emfuleni and Metsimaholo Local Municipalities, Cllr Siphon Radebe, Cllr Jack Malandi, and the Chairperson of Rand Water Board, Mr Ramateu Monyokolo. Other attendees included representatives from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment, among others.

The workshop included a site inspection of the Vaal River Barrage, allowing participants to witness first-hand the extent of the pollution and its impact on the ecosystem. This was followed by an in-depth engagement session with various stakeholders, where ideas and strategies were shared to address the challenges at hand.

Addressing the workshop, Minister Mchunu highlighted the purpose of the event and how it aims to address the challenges that Water Service Authorities are currently facing. He expressed appreciation for those who attended, as their presence shows a shared commitment to tackle these critical issues.

“This workshop is intended to ring the bell to all of us as authorities at different levels, wherever we are to say we need to look after our rivers, so your presence here signifies a shared commitment to addressing the critical challenges facing our Water Services Authorities, especially regarding wastewater discharge and management of invasive species in our dams particularly in the Vaal and Hartbees dams,” alludes the Minister.





## water & sanitation

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Minister Mchunu emphasized the importance of the Vaal River as a lifeline for industries, ecosystems, and communities in South Africa. He also expressed concern that it is under threat from those who are supposed to protect it.

“The Vaal River is not just a river that we have, it is a lifeline for our communities, industries, and ecosystems however its health is under threat not from natural disasters but from us” he said.

He mentioned that despite having a formal system to measure the state of wastewater systems in the country, the current state of rivers is concerning. He also mentioned the extension to mine water.

“Now there have been increasing instances and concerns around pollution of the rivers, reports that the current state of the rivers is quite concerning but there is a formal system in which we also measure states of our systems, that is a wastewater system in our country which is the broader part of pollution if those systems don’t work properly, it also extends to mine water in terms of compliance.

Mchunu announced the creation of a forum, and the selection of a chairperson based on merit and love for South Africa. While preference may be given to individuals with environmental experience, the most important factor is that the chosen person is a patriot who cares for the country and has a good record of service, as indicated on their resume.

As part of the workshop’s resolutions to the crisis, the Minister also announced the creation of a national registry of polluters to promote accountability for river pollution, the appointment of key players, the identification of key systems, the development of work plans, the appointment of a communication channel that will be most effective on the programme, which will list municipalities’ performance in managing their effluent where wastewater plants are present monthly on their publications.

The Minister further announced that there will be a meeting of mayors of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and Tshwane together with MMs and their relevant Directors who work on sanitation on Friday, 19 April 2024, led by Deputy Minister Judith Tshabalala.

**Mashile Tshigofatso**

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