

**Launch of Water Week and the Framework on Water for  
Growth and Development**

**Speech by Mrs L B Hendricks MP, Minister of Water Affairs  
and Forestry**

**Emperors Palace, Johannesburg**

**2 March 2009**

**Theme : WATER IS LIFE – SECURING THE NATION’S  
NEEDS ACROSS GENERATIONS**

Ambassador Briet

Councillors

Programme Director

Honoured guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

**Introduction**

It gives me great pleasure to address you today at the start of the 2009 National Water Week and also to launch of the Framework on Water for Growth and Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our theme for National Water Week 2009 is: **“Water is life – Securing the nations needs across**

**generations”**. This theme could not have been more relevant given where we are in the global landscape. All countries have to respond to a myriad of global challenges at all fronts be it political, economic, social or environmental, including climate change. The increasing pressure to deal with increasing economic and social demands, in a declining world economy presents particular challenges to us as the water sector. It certainly presents pressure on our natural resource base and our environment. It is therefore paramount, colleagues, that as we respond and rise up to the challenge we should not lose sight of our responsibility to use our resources in a sustainable manner.

Water Week is celebrated annually during the month of March and includes a series of events to promote water conservation whilst also celebrating our successes with regard to securing the rights of all citizens to have access clean water.. The key goal of the National Water Week is to raise the profile of water as a key resource for socio-economic development hence the need to educate people on the importance of protecting and conserving this limited resource.

Our approach to the “water week” programme this year is somewhat different to previous years in that there will be events taking place throughout the month of March. The focus of our activities is once again to reinforce a culture of conserving and

using water sparingly. Water Week gives us the opportunity to draw attention to the water related issues in South Africa and to impress upon all citizens the key role they play in protecting our water resources and to ensure that our resources are not polluted.

I will also be participating/attending, together with a significant (large) delegation from South Africa, the 5<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum which takes place from 16 to 22 March in Istanbul Turkey where we will be considering, at a global level, challenges relating to security, adaptability and solidarity in relation to water matters in order to advance a programme of action to increase access to safe water and basic sanitation and to improve water resources management. World Water Day will be celebrated on the 22 March under the international theme “Trans-boundary Water” (sharing water, sharing opportunities).

It is important to always remind all South Africans, that our country is classified amongst the driest countries by world standard hence the importance of ensuring that the little water we have is protected from pollution and conserved to achieve efficient use. This requires careful management of this valuable resource so that we are able to extend basic water services to every citizen whilst meeting the needs of economic growth without threatening the environmental integrity of our water resources. Government is constantly balancing the escalating

and competing demands on the country's limited water resources, ever mindful of the fact that water for social development, economic growth and environmental sustainability are equally important for the success and prosperity of this country.

## **Achievements**

It is important for us to take a moment to reflect on the road we have travelled and appreciate what we have achieved over the past fifteen years. When the first democratic government took over in 1994, it was confronted with massive infrastructure backlogs, fragmented institutional arrangements, outdated policies and repressive legislation. It took a lot of time and financial investment to correct these anomalies, and there are still remnants of our divided past that still haunt us today and will still take us some time to undo.

We take pride in our successes to date, which include the development of outstanding policy and legislation. Inevitably, the initial years of our programmes focused on servicing unserved areas of our country and addressing the needs of the poor, especially those residing in the former homelands, which led to massive infrastructure programmes to address the backlogs that resulted from decades of separate development and neglect. The fact that our country still faces backlogs in

some localities often distracts us from taking pride in our successes since 1994. We are recognised internationally for achieving what seemed impossible in terms of reducing historic backlogs – today, millions of our people have access to clean water and safe sanitation facilities. South Africa’s policies and legislation are also acclaimed world-wide for being progressive, pro-poor and adhering to universal human rights. To achieve this, we had to go through very difficult changes in an attempt find the suitable policies and institutional mechanisms while ensuring a fair balance between our responsibility to provide services and the need to subject ourselves to constant review and repositioning.

Over the past ten years, local government has been gradually introduced as the centre of community-level service delivery, including water services, and therefore our focus shifted to local government support to ensure that municipalities were able to assume this responsibility effectively.

## **Challenges**

Ladies and Gentlemen whilst we celebrate our success we should quickly point out that we still have more to do. The sector is still faced with a lot of challenges including but no limited to: aging infrastructure; improving government’s ability to deliver including addressing skills shortages; curbing

pollution; etc. In resolving these challenges, I am inviting you as the sector to join me and my department to join us on the journey to reach even greater heights of delivery so that we can guarantee the provision of the right quantity and quality of water in order to meet all our nations' needs. Having been in charge of the portfolio for the last 3 years I have come to realise that partnerships and working together with you we can do more and hence our Flagship programme, which is funded by the EU, is called Masibambane.

On that note let me once again thank the EU for their ongoing support of our work in this regard and from my side I can officially confirm that the funding, insights, technical support that the EU has provided over the years have invaluablely assisted us in achieving many of the goals we set ourselves. Mr Ambassador let me once more say in a true South African spirit – 'VIVA MASIBAMBANE'

I have observed that recent media reports about South Africa's drinking water quality have created panic both from the country's citizens and our visitors from abroad. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry would like to re-assure South Africans that the country's tap water is safe to drink.

The Department acknowledges that the water might at times not meet the required technical standard, according to our management systems (electronic Water Quality Management &

Drinking Water Quality Regulation). Still, this does not mean the water in the country is not safe for human consumption. Regular water quality tests are conducted and on average 3000 samples are taken nationwide from water supply systems for this purpose. Our monthly reporting indicates that 98% of all samples taken comply with the Health aspects as listed in the South African National Standards {SANS 241: 2006}.

Drinking water quality management is the responsibility of municipalities; and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, has an oversight and regulatory role on the quality of tap water. We have implemented a country-wide system to assist with the overall management of drinking water quality.

The Department has already commenced with its incentive-based regulation programme, the Blue Drop Certification Programme, with the objective of awarding excellent drinking water quality management in different towns.

A secondary objective is also to allow the general public to be adequately and responsibly informed on the regulator's confidence levels in drinking water quality management levels per service system (town/city). First assessments in all 9 provinces were completed and final audits and assessments have commenced to inform the inaugural public report in May/June 2009.

The department would like to reiterate its commitment to ensuring that all South Africans are served with the highest quality drinking water. Our national standard compares well with the World Health Organisation's limits (which have been adopted as standards for the European Union and other developed countries, including UK, Canada and Australia).

South Africa's tap water is still ranked among the best in the world because we have water service systems which record similar compliance levels as our counterparts in developed countries.

### **Water is central to the government's programme**

In his State of the Nation Address, the President reminded us of government's responsibility to support economic development in the country by removing critical bottlenecks such as the lack of adequate infrastructure, the unavailability of appropriate skills and lack of regulation. These are all relevant to the water sector, and water remains as a key enabler for socio-economic growth, especially in a country such as ours.

The President also reminded us that access to basic services and meeting the Millennium Development Goals, remains at the top of the agenda of government's programme of action. This means that we need to accelerate efforts to support local



government's municipal infrastructure development programme. This we must do without neglecting our responsibilities in other areas such as asset management, water quality and water conservation & demand management. . Again, whilst we are constitutionally obliged to support local government, we must equally ensure that municipalities discharge their functions within our regulatory framework.

Whilst South Africa's economy has been and is growing in new directions, and the country faces new challenges as its democracy matures; the development agenda is broadening to address new priorities. I strongly believe that all of us agree that securing our water needs is an important measure towards addressing these priorities. I equally believe that all of us irrespective of political affiliation agree that poverty eradication, access to health services and job creation are amongst the key development priorities of our nation.

For our programmes to be relevant, they need to address these priorities within the ambit of government's programme of action, and with a direct response to guiding economic and development strategies such as AsGISA and the Anti-Poverty Strategy. Most importantly, we need to ensure that decisions on key government programmes are informed by the status of water availability, balanced allocation and the need for improved water use and efficiency.

## **Water for Growth and Development**

This brings me to so the second, and undoubtedly the most important reason that we are gathered here today and that is to launch the **Water for Growth and Development Framework**. This framework is the result of two years of consultations with key players in the water sector. Let me just pause for a moment and thank all our water sector partners for their valuable input which has led to the development and finalisation of the Framework. In January 2009, Cabinet considered the Framework and granted approval for us to continue to engage in an extensive consultation process with all stakeholders involved in the water sector regarding the implementation of the recommendations emanating from this Framework. The process of developing the framework has forced both government and the water sector partners to confront some hard truths about challenges in the sector, it has also provided a platform for us to continue to engage in seeking appropriate long-term solutions to respond to these challenges.

This framework is a ground breaking initiative of Government (my Department) that will set in motion a course of action to ensure that there is sufficient water, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, to support South Africa's growth trajectory and development. There must be sufficient water available for us to achieve our economic growth target. At the same time we

need to ensure that we meet the targets for universal access to water. Needless to say, that these goals have to be achieved in a way that we do not compromise the ecological sustainability of the resource. Having said this, we are going to have to make some very difficult and bold decisions in the way we harness and allocate the available resources which will have to be very different to the way we have done this in the past. Through the Water for Growth and Development Framework, we will pursue a course of action that will ensure that in future, informed decisions and trade-offs with regard to water use are taken in support of any cross-sectoral planning and development initiatives.

During the past year there have been a number of concerns raised from various quarters regarding South Africa's current and future water security. Water availability and quality have been negatively affected by illegal abstraction, water pollution and the poor management of water resources infrastructure which has culminated in severe water shortages in some places, major health impacts and environmental damage. For example, if the remedial action were not taken by government, Gauteng could start experiencing water shortages from 2013 and by 2025 the area would experience severe widespread shortages. Fortunately this will not happen given the recent decision by Cabinet to proceed with the second phase of the

Lesotho Highlands Water project subject to the conclusion of a protocol with the Government of Lesotho.

My Department is also exploring the most cost-effective and appropriate options to augment the country's water supply as complementary alternatives to the traditional but expensive augmentation schemes such as the construction of dams and inter-basin water transfers. These alternatives include water loss control, water conservation and demand management, effluent re-use or effluent recycling, desalination for coastal locations and groundwater abstraction.

The Department will continue to engage extensively and intensively with other sector Departments and water sector users on the recommendations outlined in the Water for Growth and Development Framework. An outcome of this engagement will be the mainstreaming of water use requirements in critical sectoral planning decisions, to effect change in water use behaviour among those who negatively affect our water resources, as well as consultation on the setting of targets per water use sector through a consensus-seeking approach. My Department is currently exploring a potential mix of mechanisms to effect these changes which includes regulatory and market-based instruments, self-regulation, awareness and education. The Director General, Ms Pam Yako will elaborate further on this framework, later in the programme.

## Conclusion

In bringing my address to a conclusion, let me stress Ladies and Gentlemen that water is a shared responsibility. We have to make water everybody's business. We need to strengthen multi-stakeholder dialogues on the security and the utilisation of our water to achieve balanced and sustainable socio-economic development. It is important that we establish and maintain strong cooperation within government, within the broader water sector, and between government and the private and civil sectors. There are therefore a number of areas for which action will be required where such cooperation will be absolutely necessary, and these are:

- Ensuring safe drinking water and sanitation for all;
- Ensuring increased water use efficiency especially in agriculture;
- Increasing protection of water resources (rivers, springs, dams, and groundwater; and
- Responding positively to the impact of climate change.

In this regard, practical actions would include:

- Increased research on improved appropriate technology to deal with various challenges (water quality, storage, access, recycling etc);

- Financing of the various initiatives to improve water availability and quality;
- Skills development and knowledge management; and
- Institutional development and support.

Finally, Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen, it is understood that there is no single solution to remedy the growing water stress and rainfall unreliability. Furthermore the impact of climate change will exacerbate the situation. The Water for Growth and Development Framework addresses these key issues, it is a framework that maps a course of action to ensure that the central role of water is promoted as a cross-sectoral input that supports social development, economic growth and ecological sustainability.

We will continue to engage the various sectors to fine tune our plans and get the necessary commitment on the Framework. This framework should be owned by all of us as a shared commitment to act collectively towards **securing the Nations water needs across generations.**

Thank you