

PRESS BRIEFING
Parliament
30th August 1999

1. It is now just seventy days since I took over responsibility for this portfolio. Things started with a bang, in fact, when, in my first week in office, a bomb was found in a reservoir near Pretoria.

1.1 How I have spent my time

Since my first days in office, I have spent my time at briefings all over the country – travelling, looking, listening and learning.

I have been briefed by the management team of the Department. I have met with thousands of members of the Department's staff. I have met, too, with many of our key stakeholders: the teams that run our water boards, members of the National Forestry Advisory Council, the Water Research Commission and many others.

I have also dealt with issues on the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and met my counterparts from Mozambique and Swaziland to sign agreements on the sharing of the Komati River.

1.2 Travelling, looking, listening and learning

Over the past seventy days, I have had the opportunity to come to grips with the realities of South Africa: from Augrabies to Bushbuckridge, Ceres to Dukuduku and, if you want me to go right through the alphabet, we did finish last week in some small villages on the Lesotho border near Zastron.

As I crossed the country, (and my Department tells me I have so far clocked up well over fifteen thousand kilometres on my visits to the rural areas), I have come face to face with the terrible poverty in which so many of our people live.

I have met women with tiny babies on their backs, scooping water from muddy pools. I have met others who share water with donkeys, drawing their drinking from farmers' irrigation canals.

But I have also had the privilege of meeting activists, energetic and visionary people, committed to turning their communities' dreams into realities.

I have talked, under the spreading mango trees in the poorest part of KwaZulu Natal, to young women who make a living by helping to run water schemes.

I have met Afrikaner farmers who have come together on the Blyde river to find ways of sharing their water and their prosperity with their black neighbours.

I have walked through sawmills and heard first hand from managers how difficult it is to run an efficient business and stick to the rules of the public service.

I have met the so-called bushmillers, who eke out a living in the distant forests of the Eastern Cape, supplying planks and rafters to builders for hundreds of miles around.

It has been a fascinating and illuminating time for me, giving me great insight into the nature and extent of the challenges we face.

2. DEVELOPING A PROGRAMME OF WORK

I consider myself fortunate to have come into a Department in which a great deal has been done. Policies and programmes have been put in place and the process of transformation and delivery is underway.

This has helped me begin to think systematically about my own programme of work.

Shortly after my appointment, I sat down with the department's management to review progress and critical issues. This has been an ongoing process and will, by mid-September, have culminated in a three-day strategic planning lekgotla to interrogate the results. This will be followed by sessions with some of the key stakeholders before the end of September.

When we have completed this work – and I plan to make sure this happens before my first hundred days are up – I will be in a position to give you a broad strategic assessment of the direction the Department will take over the next five years and how we are going to implement it.

So I am not going to announce any major plans or programmes today. I plan instead to give you an indication of what I have observed so far as I have followed the President's directive and got down to work.

3. **THE CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT**

It would perhaps be helpful to start with a brief outline of what the Department does. I know, from my own experience, that the full scope of its activities is not always appreciated.

The Department operates in three core areas: water services, forestry and water resources management.

3.1 **Water Services**

In Water Services, our ultimate aim is to ensure that all South Africans have access to acceptable water supply and sanitation services. This is the taps and toilets side of the business. In principle, it is local government that should actually operate the services. But the nature of our inheritance is that many of our people, particularly those in the poorest communities in the rural areas of the former homelands, rely on us to provide and operate the infrastructure they need and will, for quite some time.

3.2 **Water Resources**

Water resources management addresses the bigger issues, physically and organisationally. It includes the design, construction and operation of the great dams, the huge inter-basin transfers that link the Orange River to the Limpopo and the Tugela. This component of the Department is responsible for the planning, development and regulation of water resources in the country, making sure that the big cities, mines and industries have enough water, reliable water, for their needs.

If Water Services is about the problems and priorities of today, Water resources is about the inheritance we will leave our children and our children's children. Conservation of our resources and forward planning is critical if we are to prepare for the water and environmental needs of the next thirty years.

Hence, Water Resources must also make sure that our fragile rivers, lakes and wetlands are protected from pollution and over exploitation. In South Africa, we do not enjoy the luxury of a reliable climate and plentiful pure water. We have to work extremely hard to ensure that our environment is protected while, at the same time, meeting the needs of society.

3.3 **Forestry**

Finally, in Forestry, we are still running a sizeable commercial plantation, though restructuring will soon change the emphasis of our work. We are responsible for the protection of the little indigenous forest we have, as well as promoting the greening of our urban and rural deserts and campaigning to make trees an integral part of the life of all South Africans.

[you could talk about Stofile and Zuma's excitement about your forests of memories project here]

3.4 **DWAF and Rural Development**

In many ways, the Department of Water Affairs can be viewed as a rural development department. So the challenge presented by President Mbeki to develop an integrated approach to rural development is one we feel very keenly.

And we are actively engaged on both sides of development. We do not just provide services. We also create opportunities for economic development and jobs, in forestry and irrigation, in ensuring that factories and mines, offices and tourist resorts have the services they need to function competitively.

We are, for example, considering how we work with other arms of government to maximise the opportunities created to establish black farmers in the irrigation farming business. These schemes are on the Orange River in the Northern Cape, at Pongola in KwaZulu/Natal, in the Blyde river irrigation area and in various parts of the Eastern Cape.

So what are the key issues I have come across in my travels?

4. WATER SERVICES: KEY ISSUES

One of the things that struck me most on my travels was the gross indignity that so many of our people, our women especially, have to confront every time they need to find water to drink, or to wash or cook with.

4.1 Status of water projects

In 1994, about 12 million people were without water. Since then, the population has grown by perhaps four million. But, through local government and water boards in the cities and towns, through my Department's efforts in the rural areas, the backlog has been reduced to about 7,5 million. Although I still want to go through the figures, the general picture is confirmed by independent sources such as the recent Statistics South Africa Rural Survey which focused on the former homeland areas.

However, for as long as one young girl has to miss school to walk five kilometres to get water for her family, our work in this Department will not be done.

4.2 Sanitation

We have been much less successful in the area of sanitation. Even in our towns, far too many people living in informal settlements have no hygienic and acceptable toilet facilities. The same is true of most rural areas. In 1994, more than 20 million people were without basic sanitation. That legacy, yet another apartheid disgrace, must still be overcome.

4.3 Working with local government

Our policy for water supply and sanitation was developed in 1994. Since then, local government has been formalised and is operational in many areas. I will, therefore, be working closely with my colleague, the Minister responsible for Local Government, with the South African Local Government Association and other interested parties to bring our policy up to date and in line with our new realities.

4.4 The example of Arabia

I saw something of the enormous challenges we face in the Arabia area, in the southern part of Sekhukhuniland in the Northern Province. On that dry and barren plateau, a major bulk water scheme has been built. At first glance, it is extremely impressive, bringing pure water to reservoirs that stand on hills above 60 villages. The residents, however, told me that these reservoirs were "white elephants" - the water might well be on the hill but it was not in their villages where they could use it.

I told the community that the reservoirs are not white elephants. I said that they are our own great African elephants waiting to deliver; we will harness their power to meet our needs - and I intend to see that that happens, within the next 18 months.

4.5 Speeding up delivery

This and other examples have convinced me of the need to find ways to speed up delivery of water. Similarly, we must find ways to get the sanitation programme moving on the ground.

It is still too early to give you targets but I am working towards a clear idea of what we can expect to achieve within our budget constraints. It is a sad fact that we cannot, in our country, afford to give people water free. We need to find ways to make it affordable, and persuade communities to invest in their own development as far as they are able.

4.6 Working together throughout government

In particular, we will be seeking to ensure that we live up the President Mbeki's simple requirement that all departments and all spheres of government must work in collaboration with one another. When a school is built, it must have water, a road and electricity.

We will have to find effective ways to work in partnership with the teams that help local government to provide municipal services. One of the challenges for the Department is to adapt from being a direct service provider to helping to build the capacity of local government. In the end, we will be measured by our collective impact on the ground, not by the success or failure of our individual Departments.

5. WATER RESOURCES

And now to Water Resources.

I am sure I don't have to tell you how arid our country is; how poor and unreliable our rainfall and our rivers. We forget this reality at our peril.

In the apartheid years, the focus of water management was on the needs of farmers.

5.1 Efficiency, sustainability and quality

Today, in line with our policy and legislation, the task of the water resources managers is to ensure that water is used efficiently, in a way that promotes economic and social development.

But water must be used sustainably. In addition, the quality of our water must be maintained. Water that is too polluted to use is of no use to anybody.

5.2 Registration of bulk water users

I will not take you through the new approaches that were introduced by the National Water Policy and legislation. What I want to highlight today is that a key starting point, the registration of existing bulk water users, is about to begin. And here I am not talking about registering all of the millions of boreholes in the country nor about forcing you to take out a licence before you have a shower. Some fifty per cent of our water is used in agriculture and 40 per cent in mining. Comparatively, domestic use is very small.

Our aim then is to register the few tens of thousands of users – municipalities, factories, mines and farmers – who use the majority of the water. This registration is essential to ongoing management of our water. It will guide allocation to ensure fair shares between users. It will also be the basis for levying charges, because we assured the Minister of Finance that the new system would be funded by its users.

5.3 Other water projects

There are other projects in progress.

The construction of the Injaka dam in the Bushbuckridge area is progressing well and will assure water to the million people in the area as well as to the Kruger park and Mozambique.

Construction of the new dam at Nwamitwa on the Luvuvhu River in Northern Province has begun. And, by the end of the year, we will make an announcement about the start of construction of Skuifraam dam which will ensure the supply of water to Cape Town and surrounding areas.

The Lesotho Highlands Water project is progressing well, despite the problems that took place pre-1995 which have recently come to light.

Similarly, the next phase of the Komati River development, the construction of the Maguga dam in Swaziland is now well underway.

5.4 Water conservation

Water conservation is now firmly embedded as a key element of water management. Working for Water, a programme that creates jobs, improves the environment and reduces water loss by removing alien vegetation in sensitive catchments, continues as an effective practical intervention, with recent problems in the Southern Cape on the way to resolution. Today, the programme employs 20 000 people and has received R120 million contribution to poverty relief this financial year.

Another area we need to deal with is how to minimise water lost in leaks. In Soweto, for example, some 50 per cent of water is lost by unnecessary leaking. An effective pilot programme is now dealing with this problem.

5.5 Black irrigation farmers

Water is life not just for people but for the economy as well. If we use our water well, we will see the benefits in jobs and prosperity. We intend tackling this as part of Government's programme of integrated rural development.

6. FORESTRY

In Forestry, too, the Department has been focusing on economic development and good progress has been made in a number of key areas.

6.1 The bid to lease assets

The process towards leasing the assets of SAFCOL and about half the assets of the Department (some 330 hectares) is at a critical stage. Bids were received on Friday. Once they have been evaluated, the Minister of Public Enterprises (who is responsible for restructuring of assets) will make his announcement. By the end of this year, we expect that the process of evaluation, selection of preferred bidder and negotiations will be completed and the final contracts signed.

This is not a crude privatisation process. It is yet another example of the approach of this government – doing the right thing for the economy, while ensuring that public interests are protected and government's goals achieved.

We have, for example, been careful to protect the interests of the landless. Because the forest land is being leased for 70 years and not sold, the beneficiaries of successful land claims will be entitled to the rentals the state will receive. The lease conditions also protect broader community rights of access and enjoyment as well as guaranteeing protection of the environment. Finally, the interests of labour have been assured. Some Departmental staff will be taking severance packages. These have been negotiated and include a social plan to help those affected to find other ways of earning a living.

We hope that the restructuring will see renewed investment, not just in forestry but in downstream production. This will be accompanied by significant black involvement.

6.2 Further restructuring

There is also to be further restructuring of our commercial forestry. Arrangements in respect of a group of smaller plantations are to be concluded. The total size of this is 75 thousand hectares. The larger areas will be offered to investors with an emphasis on small and medium businesses. Other small forests and community woodlot will be handed over to community ownership.

These changes will mean that the Department can concentrate on the management of indigenous forests and the retraining of foresters to do this work.

6.3 Auditing indigenous forest management

We are also auditing the state of indigenous forest management to determine whether we can assign more to the provincial conservation authorities who, in some cases, are very keen to take it on.

6.4 Community forestry and Arbor Week

Community forestry requires a more focused approach. We need to define clear goals – to meet the energy and fuel needs of the rural poor, promote urban and rural greening and instil a tree culture in the hearts of South Africans. Then we need a clear strategy to achieve them.

One important vehicle for this is Arbor Week, which starts tomorrow. This year we will, amongst other things, be planting trees in memory of South Africans who have lost their lives. In addition to the adopted slogan, "Trees in our Lives", we have introduced a new concept into our Arbor Day celebrations: "Plant a tree. Heal our Land".

On Wednesday, President Mbeki will plant a tree in the Tuynhuys garden, in memory of the cruel and often inhuman treatment meted out to the Khoisan people. In your pack, you will find an extensive programme of the week's activities.

7. TRANSFORMATION

7.1 Our budget

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is a large organisation with over 27000 staff. Our budget this year is over R2,7 billion, with R1.2 billion for water services, 916.201 million for water resources and 365 million for forestry. The Department's corporate budget is R119 million. In addition, sales of water and timber bring in an additional R1,4 billion which is managed in a separate trading account.

7.2 Rationalisation and restructuring

The Department is still completing the rationalisation and restructuring needed to bring into one unit the disparate pieces inherited from the former homelands. In 1994, when we incorporated the homelands, our staff grew threefold, from 9000 people to 27 000.

In all three of the main functional areas, policy requires that many functions be transferred out to other institutions.

In commercial forestry, for example, nearly 4000 of the commercial forestry workers will either transfer to new operators or take severance packages. In water services, staff are already being transferred to water boards and local governments. And, as we establish catchment management agencies in the water resources field, work will be devolved on them.

In all these changes, we will be guided by the careful negotiations and social planning provisions that characterised our restructuring in forestry. Staff will generally be changing employer rather than losing jobs.

7.3 Building a new culture in the public service

Managing an organisation in a period of change is a huge challenge, as I know from my experience in Defence.

But there is another critical challenge we all face. We must build a new public service. It must be a service that is representative of the country. And it must work in new ways, reflecting the Batho Pele – people first – principles of our democratic government.

7.4 Promoting representativity in the Department

As you will see from the documents in the press pack, and indeed from the people in front of you, considerable progress has been made towards making our senior management more representative.

In 1994, (after incorporation of former homeland staff) only 15% of Directors and 8% of Chief Directors were black and there were no black officials at higher levels. Today, the figure is 45% from Director to Director General.

The picture is not quite as good in relation to gender. In 1994, there were no women in management. Today there are four women at Chief Director level and a further five at Director level, out of 67 positions in the top echelon. This is a mere 13% and much greater progress is required. In an age when increasing numbers of women are graduating with distinction at our major universities, there is really no excuse for this.

7.5 Respecting the dignity of staff and the public

I must emphasise, however, that transformation is not just about bringing in new staff and making the Department more representative. It is about developing new ways of working with each other and with the public we serve.

I will demand that we work in a way that respects the dignity of all our staff, regardless of their station or status in life. The same is true for the way we deal with the broader community. We must build a public service that truly serves the public.

8. CONCLUSION

It is a real challenge to take responsibility for this Department with its challenges and capabilities. It is a Department with a sound platform of policy and a record of achievement on which I intend to build.

8.1 Finding creative ways to effect delivery

I must point out that the scale of what we have to achieve is simply enormous. The responsibility of simply maintaining our operations in terms of water delivery takes up a very large portion of our resources, with little left over for new water projects.

This means that we need to find creative ways of maximising our achievements, looking at options and cost efficiencies.

8.2 Planning a 5-year campaign

At the outset, I referred to the strategic planning process within the Department and with external role players in order to outline the way ahead before the end of September for the next five years. I will be looking in detail at delivery, in order to assess exactly who is receiving our services, where they are and how well they are working.

Once I have examined all the available information, I will be ready to move into detailed strategic planning for the next five years. Only when I have worked out this campaign in all its details will I be ready to move into full implementation.

8.3 Human resources: building the team

Another related area I will be looking at carefully is our human resources in the Department. The team we build will be crucial to our work in the next five years. It must be a representative team. But it must also be a team that capable of serving the public interest; a team dedicated to the creation of a better life for all our people.

Armed with a detailed strategic plan and accompanied by a skilled and enthusiastic team, I believe we can achieve a great deal in the next five years.

8.4 Key challenges over 5 years

In a nutshell, the key challenges that lie before us are sustainable delivery at community and local government level; outreach into areas that have not yet received services; the implementation of sanitation; the vital area of conservation and catchment management; and greening our rural and urban wastelands.

In order to achieve these goals, we are developing a planning framework to create what we have called a "virtual operations room". This will guide our operations inside the Department, as well as helping to ensure co-ordination with other Departments and spheres of government. The basic planning data will be made electronically available throughout the country.

Finally, nothing can be achieved without collaboration with my Cabinet colleagues and their Department. The philosophy of the cluster approach introduced by the President aims to ensure that we all work together to attain sustainable and integrated delivery on a holistic basis.

The last 70 days have been exciting, shocking, stimulating and challenging. After almost three decades of, at times, living and working in the bush before I returned to South Africa, I have been extremely happy to find myself in a position where I can make some contribution by way of delivery to the lives of the rural poor.

I look forward to coming back to you, in a month or so after the culmination of our strategic planning, to outline in more detail our plans and focus areas for the next five years.