

Water Research Commission (WRC) Open Day and launch of the “Careers in Water” guide

**Keynote Address by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Grahamstown
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Chairperson of the Board of the Water Research Commission, Prof Kasan; Director-General of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mr Muller; the Chief Executive Officer of the Water Research Commission, Dr Kfir; Honoured Guests, Educators and Learners – I greet you all this afternoon.

Programme Director, it gives me great pleasure to launch this innovative guide, which focuses on careers, especially careers in the water sector.

I would like to note with great appreciation this strategic contribution by the Water Research Commission to the country’s human resource development especially in the area of scarce skills that, according to the different surveys that have been conducted, we suffer dearly.

The National Research and Development Strategy that, as a country we adopted in 2002, seeks to address the huge gap we have in the area of scarce skills, especially science and technology, among others. The strategy highlights our dire situation with regard to the numbers of researchers we have. It states, that –

“Our human resources in science and technology are not being adequately developed and renewed; we have an aging and shrinking scientific population. The key indicators show that black and women scientists, technologists and engineers are not entering the academic ranks and that the key infrastructure consists of people who will soon retire.”

The Water Research Commission, true to its mission of being South Africa’s hub for water-centred knowledge, is also taking a serious step to respond to this capacity gap. This initiative is one facet of the Commission’s commitment to bridge chasms by embarking on capacity-building drives. The initiative to launch “careers in water” will surely unlock the potential of especially young South Africans as well as create conducive environment for them to develop into distinguished (water) scientists.

Good quality water is undoubtedly central to our country’s economy: It is a vital ingredient in the domestic, industrial and agricultural sectors. South Africa, being a water-stressed country, needs to manage this scarce resource judiciously, hence careers in water is a vital need.

Ladies and gentlemen, the importance of research in modern, knowledge-based economies cannot be overemphasised. Research in support of policy is also crucial to sound governance. The “Careers in Water” process should be able to guide careers in the field of water to contribute towards government’s socio-economic development programmes especially in the area of Local Economic Development for the benefit of ordinary people. Remember, it is mainly to the poorest of the poor that the water sector and our department can be a strategic and a significant partner.

I would also appeal to the WRC to contribute to placing Science at the service of humanity as a whole and to make Science contribute directly to the quality of life of present and future generations.

As we celebrate our first decade of democracy, we can be proud of the fact that our water provision and sanitation services have improved radically, especially as far as the rural and peri-urban populations are concerned. However, in order to ensure sustainability of this precious resource, all South Africans need to show commitment to conserving water and the infrastructure itself.

There is a dire need for people to join hands with Government in order to benefit from a clean and reliable source of water as well as a safe and hygienic sanitation service.

People working in the field of water make a major contribution to the quality of life of individuals as well as the long-term sustainability of the country. We need more skilled people in the water sector, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Hence, this guide is an avenue to meeting this critical goal and as government, we are cognisant of the fact that this can only be achieved through robust and sustainable public-private partnerships.

There are many opportunities for people who would like to pursue a career in the water sector, be it in central, provincial, or local government, the water industry, other related services or academia.

The emphasis on the multidisciplinary approach to research is also of vital importance because we all know that our challenges do not respect disciplinary boundaries.

The material being exhibited here today is an exciting example of knowledge that social scientists, natural scientists and engineers working in the water field have produced and are still producing.

This knowledge should be used to improve the way we, as a country and as a society, provide for water and sanitation services and manage and use our precious water resources. In the process we will be contributing to better health, sustainable livelihoods, reduction in poverty and a better environment.

It is important that you, the learners, make the correct subject choice for your future so that you enjoy job satisfaction and, more importantly, so that you are a valuable asset to your country's machinery. This guide has been specially designed for you by the Water Research Commission, should you be interested in becoming part of South Africa's vibrant water sector – the direction to which I will encourage you. Use it wisely.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to officially launch "*Careers in Water*", a career guide prepared by the Water Research Commission.

I thank you.