

**Official launch of uThukela Water**  
**Keynote Address by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Newcastle**  
**28 June 2004**

The Honourable Premier, Cabinet Ministers, MECs, the Honourable Mayors and Deputy Mayors, Councillors, Amakhosi, Chairperson of uThukela Water and members of the Board, honourable guests, officials, ladies and gentlemen.

Programme Director - it is indeed a great honour and privilege for me to be invited at this most important occasion that is part of a broader programme of government to improve the quality of life of all South Africans.

As government, we made a commitment to the people of South Africa, including the people of KwaZulu-Natal that, as we consolidate the achievements of Ten Years of Democracy we are steadfast in dealing with the challenges of the second decade of freedom.

The President, in his State of the Nation Address set very clear targets for all of us in our various sectors of governance. I am sure I do not need to reiterate what the President said in his State of the Nation Address but what is important is that the targets he set are not only for national government departments and Ministries but they are for all of us at different spheres and levels of government. In executing these, we are guided by the principle of Co-operative Governance that is provided for in Chapter 3 of our Constitution.

It is therefore the responsibility of all of us to ensure that our water resources are well managed for the benefit of all the citizens of our country. It is also our Constitutional mandate to ensure equitable access to water and sanitation for all. The Constitution promises all citizens the right to dignity.

uThukela Water Partnership, which is established by the three District Municipalities - uMzinyathi, Amajuba and uThukela and the Newcastle Local Municipality - as a Regional Water Services Provider, will go a long way in realising the government's imperative of providing access to basic water and sanitation to the people of this region.

Ladies and gentlemen, it makes us proud as government and the people of South Africa to see the implementation of the policies of government at work. uThukela Water Partnership is a positive response to section 87 of the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, which provides for the establishment of a Multi-Jurisdictional Municipal Service District (MJMSD) to facilitate the sharing of resources across the borders of municipalities and thus achieving economies of scale.

The Newcastle Local Municipality should be commended for establishing the Municipal Service Partnership (MSP) with uThukela Water, implementing the provisions of the Water Services Act of 1997 requiring the Water Services Authorities (Municipalities) to facilitate the establishment of Water Services Providers.

We hope that this Private Public Partnership (PPP), which is also at the core of government's service delivery framework, will take the interests of the local communities and the rest of the region on board. We need not forget that the Municipal Systems Act recognises the community as having a legal status in participating in the affairs of a municipality.

Approximately 60% of the population of this region live in rural areas where there is usually acute lack of infrastructure – (and I am happy to hear that water services infrastructure is presently being developed in this region).

We therefore hope that the signing of this Municipal Service Partnership (agreement) today is clearly designed to address the challenges of water services delivery in this region. We believe that it is this regional approach that will ensure that efficient and sustainable water services is provided to communities in large rural areas of this region and others.

We also believe that this regional water utility such as uThukela Water is established to deliver water services using best practices especially for rural conditions like this region. The challenges facing uThukela water in this partnership, therefore include -

- The provision of operations and maintenance of rural schemes;
- The delivery of water and sanitation infrastructure;
- The provision of customer care services to the people who have never had access to services before;
- The financial sustainability of providing water services. This particular challenge calls for the municipality to develop an effective credit control and debt collection policy i.e. to ensure financial sustainability.
- The indigent policy on the other hand needs to be implemented to ensure that poor people who cannot afford to pay for services are assisted while those who can pay should be encouraged to pay, and
- Most importantly, the implementation of government's Basic Free Water Policy, which can be further enhanced by the implementation of the indigent policy.

I know that the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry was instrumental in the establishment of uThukela Water as early as the beginning stages of investigating the viability of establishing a water board in this region.

The result of the investigation, which took place between 1997 and 1999, indicated that a regional water utility or water board was financially viable. Based on this solid foundation laid by our Department, the local government structures took the study further and the process culminated in the decision to establish uThukela Water – this was in September 2001.

At this stage, I would like to acknowledge the role played by the Australian Government Aid Programme and the USAID in assisting this region in this very important venture. On behalf of the government and the people of South Africa, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Australian and American governments. We say thank you for joining a people's contract to create work and fight poverty.

Our Department has demonstrated its commitment and support to the establishment of uThukela Water as a viable and sustainable regional water and sanitation services utility by setting aside an amount of R23, 6 million through the Masibambane Programme. To further enhance sustainability of water services in the region, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry –

- Transferred a number of water and waste water treatment works, which had been operated and maintained by our Department, to the member municipalities of the uThukela Water Partnership as part of the regional water services provision infrastructure to assist this region in achieving its goals,
- Through the Department's Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme, we funded about 145 projects to the value of R635, 5 million, the bulk of which are water and sanitation respectively.

This programme will be completed under the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG).

Ladies and gentlemen, uThukela Water is a product of integrated and co-operative approach to development and governance. The realisation of the vision of this partnership will add to many landmarks and testimonies that as a country we are on course and can move forward to the path that we all outlined in our Reconstruction and Development programme. The realisation of this partnership will further add testimony to the fact that our policies are intact and do not need a rethought and review but that we should monitor implementation.

As government has always advocated – we need to co-operate and build together as National, Provincial and Local government in partnership with the civil society.

Our Department will remain committed to supporting uThukela Water in its efforts to realise the dream of the people of this region. We will continue to strive towards the creation of

innovative and sustainable approaches in the provision of water and sanitation services for the benefit of all our people.

I wish uThukela Water Partnership all the best in their operations.

I thank you.