

Bloem Water Board
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Bloemfontein
29 April 2005

Deleted: -----Page Break-----

Programme Director
Chairperson of Bloem Water Board
The rest of the Board Members
CEO, Mr Pelepele

Let me greet you this morning and apologise for not being able to be here in the morning as was planned – this is because of extremely urgent and unexpected engagements that cropped up.

This Board was inaugurated on the 1st of February this year and you were immediately expected to start with your business. In other words by this time you know exactly what the business of Bloem Water Board is. I am not going to give a lecture of the functions of Water Boards.

However what is important and for all the members of the Board to note is that your core business is about giving life to the people of South Africa as we all know water is life.

This is a big challenge for the government especially local government. The Water Boards, like Bloem Water, were established to give effect to the Water Services Act. As your main function is the supply of bulk purified water to water service authorities - in your case the Mangaung Local Municipality is your major customer. Your responsibility also covers Kopanong and Naledi Local Municipalities and extends to Ukhahlamba District Municipality in the borders of the Eastern Cape. I hope that this Board appreciates this challenge and you are ready for it. I also hear that you are all new members and the only person from the past is the CEO, we expect him to give guidance.

I must also hasten to say that you have no choice as you will have to learn very fast. I am informed that this Board goes beyond a supply of purified bulk water, but also provides important services such as reticulation, sanitation, effluent treatment and disposal.

I want to emphasise the fact that the skills and expertise that the Water Boards have acquired over time are still very much needed in our system of governance and government programme of service delivery.

The programme for our second decade of democracy is very clear and is about being practical in terms of making sure that especially poor communities benefit from the programmes of government. It is about ensuring that all types of opportunities ranging from poverty eradication, local economic development are made accessible to all.

This is the type of challenge the Board is faced with, to improve the lives of people for the better. This we all do under the guidance and leadership of local government and through our various municipalities in their capacity as Water Service Authorities, responsible for providing water to all within their areas of jurisdiction. I am sure that Bloem Water is striving to be the preferred Water Service Provider to Municipalities within its area of jurisdiction.

As you know, last year we amended the Water Services Act to allow our Water Boards to operate beyond our Borders, further giving effect to the programme of NEPAD under the framework and guidance of the African Union. We appreciate the initiative already taken by the Board – your operational agreement with the Lesotho Water and Sewerage Authority and a twinning agreement with the Northern Region Water Authority of Malawi.

I wish you luck and hope that you will work hard to sustain these co-operations.

At this stage I would like to alert you, the new Board that you have joined a Board that is under a dark cloud, so to speak. A forensic investigation has been going on in Bloem Water for more than a year and it has reached a stage of finalisation. I am not going to dwell on the investigation but just to say we are all waiting anxiously for the final report.

But what is important to note is that the forensic investigation in general covers errors relating to Governance, Administration and Accountability. The new Board is undoubtedly expected to deal with implementing the corrective steps and correct the irregularities mentioned in the Forensic Report and if necessary take appropriate actions against officials.

I personally expect the new Board to be extra vigilant and make sure this does not get repeated. It is of critical importance for the Board Members to be aware of their fiduciary duties and responsibilities as required by legislation such as the Water Services Act as well as the Public Finance Management Act and to ensure clean governance.

Issues of clean governance do not only involve responsible financial management but issues of customer relations are of vital importance. The Board should continue with its endeavours to maintain a stable financial position whilst maintaining tariff increases that are within the acceptable inflation levels.

Customers will now scrutinise the tariffs of Water Boards regularly. Water Boards will be expected to provide a breakdown of their tariffs as tariffs are now becoming more and more under the spotlight and require negotiations and deliberations at various spheres of Government.

Labour movements within Bloem Water have repeatedly raised some concerns regarding mismanagement within Bloem Water. I have been informed that these issues are getting the attention of the new Board and I hope we will have a satisfactory report.

In conclusion, I would like to wish the Board a very good luck for the onerous work you have ahead of you. But remember we are there to support you in ensuring that clean governance is the order of the day.

I THANK YOU.