

**KwaZulu-Natal Water Summit**  
**Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Durban**  
**20 September 2005**

Honourable Premier  
Honourable members of the Provincial Executive Committee  
Honourable members of Parliament and the Provincial Legislature  
Mayors and Councillors  
Our Sector Partners  
Water Boards  
Distinguished Guests  
Departmental Officials  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to address you in the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Freedom Charter on this auspicious occasion of the Water Summit of KwaZulu-Natal to realise the principles of the very important document.

Honourable Premier, bringing together all the water sector stakeholders is indeed a fitting co-operative platform for us to forge our strategies to meet the challenges that we face and together. My Department is committed to making sure that we support Provinces in realising their economic development objectives which are stated in their Growth and Development Strategies.

Your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy underlines the priorities of ensuring service delivery, integrating investments in community infrastructure, promoting sustainable economic development and job creation, and protecting the vulnerable including those with HIV/AIDS. The availability of water will play a critical role in achieving these priorities and in the development of the KwaZulu-Natal.

Over the past ten years, government officials, community structures, private sector companies, black and white, women and men, have worked long and hard to deliver water to our people, particularly to the poor and the marginalized. We are proud of the considerable progress we have made. However, the battle has not been won yet, in this Province, we still have some 3 million people that do not have access to basic water and sanitation services.

Water is life, and in our country, water is a scarce resource. We cannot provide clean reliable water and sanitation facilities to our people if we do not ensure the resource itself is protected, allocated and managed efficiently. We must also make sure that past inequalities in allocation of water resources are redressed. We want to ensure that the way we manage our water supports the achievement of the goals that we have set ourselves as a nation.

Our National Water Resource Strategy and the Water Services Strategic Framework are aimed at addressing these challenges and during the presentations and discussions, I hope you will consider how these programmes support your development objectives as clearly stipulated in your Growth and Development Strategies. These strategies further place emphasis on ensuring that disadvantaged communities are given a chance to have a say in the management of the resource. This decentralised resource management is being institutionalised by the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies and Water User Associations. I can assure you all that we are committed to enabling full stakeholder participation, including Local government.

We believe that the Water User Associations may be able to provide effective structures through which partnerships between commercial and emerging farmers and other strategic users can be established. We have potentially successful examples of this where the Bivane dam provides a secure water resource not only to the farmers who developed it, but also to nearly 50 emerging farmers on 535 hectares and to the members of this community.

In this Province, we need to pay particular attention to the allocation of water and the needs and development of small farmers who were denied opportunities in the past. We are collaborating with Provincial Government to do this and to ensure water is well managed especially when we are facing frequent droughts and changes in our climate. Together, we must ensure that water services provision is based on sound investigations into the ability of the resource to ensure sustainability of this important resource, water. We also have a challenge to ensure that the service we offer to our customers is of high quality.

My Department, as a sector leader, is also developing policies and ensuring that the necessary institutional framework is in place for local government to deliver water services. These policies will be developed through consultations such as this summit, to ensure that all views are considered and that our programmes support your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy.

Your province, in particular the Water Service Authorities of KwaZulu-Natal, must be commended on progress it has made to date with the implementation of the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) and your achievements in the provision of clean, purified, potable water and sanitation services. Lessons learnt here will be shared with other Provinces.

I must however, emphasise that planning and providing infrastructure is only the start of providing water supply and sanitation. Good management of operations is critical if we are to ensure reliable good quality supplies and avoid dry taps, blocked toilets and polluted rivers. The Delmas case in Mpumalanga is a good example of what happens when attention is not given to ensuring maintenance of infrastructure. We all are aware of the challenges facing some municipalities in the Province where problems are experienced with the management of sewage treatment and water purification plants. It is the responsibility of each Water Service Authority to ensure proper planning, budgeting and management of such infrastructure to prevent service delivery breakdowns and pollution incidents. Sufficient provision must be made for operation and maintenance of existing infrastructure to prevent service failures. We must look into the reasons of non-functionality of schemes as Presidential lead Shemula Water Supply in Umkhanyakude District Municipality and elsewhere. Are there reasons of capacity or otherwise?

Water quality monitoring systems need to be developed and put in place. The reliability and quality of service provision must be effectively monitored and reported on. Early warning systems must be established to ensure that we react to potential problems and prevent system failures. To alleviate poverty and to ensure equitable access to water services by all people, we have to ensure that the Free Basic Water and Free Basic Sanitation Policies are effectively applied in all municipalities. This can be done if we understand that it goes hand-in-hand with proper financial management and functional cost recovery to ensure financial viability of the services that municipalities provide. It is recognised that progress with the implementation of free basic water and sanitation in KZN is lagging behind other Provinces, primarily due to the competing need to provide access to those without basic services.

I am happy with the joint poverty alleviation initiative that is being undertaken by my Department's Regional office, the KZN Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. This project is aiming at identifying, areas of low environmental and water impact in each municipality where potential small timber growers on community land could be licensed to plant trees. About 30 000 to 40 000 hectares of potential land has been identified.

I have recently approved a revised policy for financial assistance to resource poor farmers. This also includes a subsidy for Rain Water Tanks for family food production.

Other problems emerging in the Province recently include water and sanitation services for low cost dense housing developments. Where ill planned systems are being upgraded to full waterborne sanitation you must please remember that it takes water to flush toilets. Make sure that existing water supply and sewage treatment infrastructure can accommodate this or make plans to expand it.

In our transition from water provider to developmental regulator, my Department will provide hands-on support to municipalities to improve their Water Services Development Plans, to ensure water conservation and to use their Municipal Infrastructure Grants effectively and institute proper monitoring programmes. We will partner the Department of Provincial and Local Government to ensure the success of Project Consolidate.

In closing, I wish to state that water has played a prominent role to establish the principles of equality, dignity and equity, the right to safe and healthy living, the right to food and jobs and an unqualified opportunity to develop our human and economic assets, hence we as government have resolved to establish a National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency by year 2008 for focused management and development of dams.

The Provincial Growth and Development Strategy has set important milestones with regard to development issues that are dependent on water services. This clearly demonstrates the common goals

and principles we share with you as a province. Let us join forces and minds and work together to achieve a better life for all our people in an effective and sustainable way.

Let this water summit be used to strengthen our National, Provincial and Local government links and ensure that we reach our common goals with regard to the water sector.

“Let there be Water and Sanitation for All!”

Thank you.