

Mpumalanga Provincial Water Summit
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Ingwenyama Conference Centre, White River
16 January 2006

Honourable Premier
Honourable members of the Provincial Executive Committee
Honourable members of Parliament and the Provincial Legislature
Mayors and Councillors
Distinguished Guests
Directors-General and Heads of Departments
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to address you today on this auspicious occasion of the Water Summit of the Mpumalanga Province. 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 we will overcome together.

At the advent of democracy in 1994, government undertook to review the fundamental principles underlying water policy in South Africa. This process culminated in the publication of the White Paper in 1995, which laid the basis for new legislation governing water resources management (National Water Act, 1998 (Act 36 of 1998)), and water services (Water Services Act, 1997 (Act 108 of 1997)).

The most important principles guiding these two pieces of legislation are that water belongs to the people of South Africa, and that as a custodian of water, government should help manage this resource sustainably, for the social and economic benefit of our people. While we are proud of the considerable progress we have made with regard to the provision of basic water and sanitation services, we still have in the order of 1,6 million people in this Province that do not have access to these very necessary basic services.

Water is life, and in our country, where water is a scarce resource we have to ensure that we protect and conserve this very precious resource. We will not be able to 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 ensure that the past inequities in allocation of water resources and access to services are redressed.

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 our strategic programmes are aligned with and support your priorities. These strategies further place emphasis on ensuring that Municipalities not only execute their mandate in respect of water services provision but are also given a chance to have a say in the management of our water resources.

Water Resource Management is a National competency as water respects no boundaries and must be allocated in the interest of the Nation as a whole. Nevertheless, we are committed to enabling full stakeholder participation in local water management issues and this will essentially be done through the establishment of Catchment Management Agencies. History was made in Mpumalanga when the first Catchment Management Agency to be established in the country was established in Inkomati Water Management Area in terms of the National Water Act, and, I am very pleased to say, that the Governing Board is chaired by a woman - Mrs Patience Nyakane.

There will in fact be two Catchment Management Agencies in this province – the Inkomati and Olifants CMA's. These Agencies will ultimately manage water resources in terms of water allocation, water use licensing and water discharges at a catchment level. We are furthermore, institutionalising the institutionalisation of water resources management at a local level by supporting the establishment of Water User Associations so that groups of water users can be assisted to co-operate in their management of this scarce resource. I can assure you that through these processes of establishing Catchment management Agencies and Water User Associations we are committed to the full participation of affected stakeholders.

In this Province we must 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 and the hardships of drought and the variability of water availability are scientifically assessed and managed. Together we must ensure that the provision of services that depend on these resources is based on sound investigations and decision making into the ability of the resource to yield sufficient water, even in drought situations. We can ill afford any negative impacts on our

consumers with systems that regularly fail due to poor planning and resources that are not able to yield sufficient water when we have below average rainfall.

Having said that, you may very well ask what are we in fact doing to ensure that you have access to sustainable resources. In this regard I would make reference to the excellent progress being made on the R 3 billion Olifants River Water Resources Development Project (ORWDP), with the raising of Flag Boshielo Dam near Marble Hall already under construction and a Record of Decision having been issued in November 2005 for the construction of the De Hoop Dam near Steelpoort. These projects are driven by the social and economic needs in both Limpopo and Mpumalanga, where there is an urgent need for socio-economic upliftment and development. More water at a reasonable level of assurance will enable considerable mining expansion and will bring about local employment, much needed economic growth and other benefits such as the much needed expansion of domestic water supply systems. I expect that if we are able to keep to our current schedule that the first water from the De Hoop Dam could be supplied as early as 2009/2010, with the full yield being available by 2011/2012.

Another very important initiatives that will contribute to sustainable water resource management particularly with regard to managing the quality of the resources and at the same time enhancing public-private partnerships, is the planned augmentation of the Emalahleni reticulated supply through a mine water treatment scheme set up by Anglo Operations Limited. This will ensure substantial cost savings to Government in that the estimated cost of R180 million to Emalahleni for the initial Vaal River Eastern Sub-system Augmentation Project (VRESAP) will not be required given that the mine water company is absorbing all the cost for the capital infrastructure. Solutions of this nature are truly beneficial since they also meet the requirements of sustainable closure management options by the mines.

Earlier in my address I made reference to the fact that water resources management is a national competence in that water respects no boundaries. How do we therefore relate to our neighbouring states? Many of the river systems in Mpumalanga are part of internationally shared water courses and we have to comply with certain international protocols and agreements in developing and managing these river systems. Continuous consultation and negotiation with our neighbouring states, Swaziland and Mozambique, in line with SADC protocols is essential to ensure that we achieve NEPAD objectives and stimulate regional development and economic growth.

While the Interim Inco-Maputo Agreement (IIMA) was signed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 as a tri-partite agreement between RSA, Swaziland and Mozambique to achieve the abovementioned objectives, we are still posed with a very complex challenges since water is already over-allocated in South Africa and with the requirements of Mozambique expected to increase; very careful planning and implementation of any development of options as well as the implementation of acceptable operating rules for joint beneficial use will be required.

Furthermore, for the purpose of joint development and management of water resources between South Africa and Swaziland, the two countries formed an international agency, the Komati Basin Water Authority (KOBWA), which is accountable to both countries through a Joint Water Commission (JWC). One aspect which still needs to be given consideration is the participation of the Mpumalanga Provincial Government on this structure

Despite the fact that we have these International Structures in place, due to the prevailing drought conditions we are currently finding it difficult to meet the agreed minimum cross border flow requirements on the Komati River system and will certainly have to find a solution to this in order to address the long term needs of the Region. I am still awaiting the outcome of an analysis of the impact of the recent rains on the system.

I am sure that we are all aware, the country has experienced below-average rainfall over the past two years leading to water shortages in many areas of the country-including Mpumalanga. However, this situation has improved somewhat in a number of areas. What invariably happens however, after extended periods of below average rainfall is that we experience high rainfall over short periods which then leads to flooding and the consequent loss of property and sometimes the loss of life. We do have to be prepared to manage these flood situations. Let me reflect on what happened in Standerton last week. It was only as a result of the management by my Department of the outflows from the Grootdraai Dam that we were able to ensure that damage to properties and infrastructure was minimised. Nevertheless, the Joint Operations Committee (JOC), still had to take the precautionary measures to prepare some 30 houses adjacent to the Vaal river for evacuation. This also happened in 1996 when families had to be evacuated and businesses were also affected. These floods will happen periodically and it is therefore imperative that the Standerton Municipality and the Provincial Department of Housing and Local Government take this into account in their planning to ensure that no development takes place in the areas which are frequently affected by flooding. I would suggest that it is necessary that urgent steps are now taken to clear these areas and to relocate the residences or alternatively to investigate alternative options of mitigating the effects of such flooding.

In many cases, the dam levels are far below average for this time of the yearly rainfall cycle. This crisis calls for co-operation between my Department and users, including municipalities. I would therefore, like to confirm that my Department will continue to offer information on the water situation, technical support to users through established disaster management systems, and support financial assistance through the routine national government disaster management funding to alleviate the effects of drought.

To date a total of R38,6 million was allocated to the various Municipalities in the province for Drought relief. In December 2005 an additional R10 million was allocated to the province to address the persistent drought problem.

Your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy underlines the priorities of ensuring service delivery, integrating investments in infrastructure, promoting sustainable economic development and job creation, and protecting the vulnerable including those with HIV/AIDS. There is no doubt that the availability of water will play a critical role in achieving these priorities and in the development of Mpumalanga. I do anticipate that the recently approved policy for financial assistance for resource poor farmers which also includes a subsidy for Rain Water Tanks for family food production will contribute to the objectives of the PGDS in a very tangible way.

The *Working for Water (WfW)* Programme that contributes to the *sustainable prevention and controlling of* invasive alien plants, also aims to address poverty relief and promote economic empowerment and transformation within a public works framework. The hydrological, ecological and agricultural long-term goals of the Working for Water Programme also includes economic development, socio-economic empowerment and institutional development. The program aims to relieve poverty by employing previously disadvantaged individuals (60% women; 20% youth; and 5% disabled).

My Department is aware of the fact that some of the Municipalities in the Province (Water Services Authorities) are faced with serious challenges with regards to service delivery to their consumers. It is absolutely critical that our resources and support programmes are integrated to ensure that these Municipalities are able to perform their functions as Water Services Authorities. Any existing capacity gaps will have to be dealt with. Municipalities must ensure that sufficient skilled people are employed to deliver a quality water services to their consumers. We all are also aware that some municipalities in the Province are experiencing problems with the management of sewage treatment works and water purification plants. I must emphasise that 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 delivery failures. My Department has committed to and will continue to give its full support to the various Project Consolidate initiatives in your Province.

The planning and the provision of infrastructure is only the start of providing water supply and sanitation. Our plans and high quality infrastructure will be of no benefit if good management of operations is not practised to ensure reliable good quality supplies and to avoid dry taps, blocked toilets and polluted rivers. Water quality monitoring and response systems must be developed and put in place. Then of course the reliability and quality of service provision must be effectively monitored and reported on and actions taken where exceptions are identified. An effective monitoring system with early warning mechanisms if established will ensure that you are able to react to potential problems and prevent system failures.

The challenge of Water Quality Management within the context of Integrated Water Resources Management requires a multi-disciplinary approach in a multi-sectoral environment to ensure sustainable total water management from source to supply and meeting the demands with regards to fitness for use from the various sectors. Strategic monitoring networks for surface water resources are developed. The information gathered is critical for the future management and development of our resources. We jointly need to develop sufficient capacity to ensure that sustainable total water management is practised.

The Delmas typhoid incident (2005) is a case in point where capacity to ensure total water management was lacking and as a result had near disastrous consequences, notwithstanding the fact that a similar incident had taken place in 1993, after which a report was commissioned by the CSIR on the incident. The recurrence in 2005 indicates that the initial recommendations, in terms of the CSIR report, made to avert a similar crisis were not followed through. The lesson learnt is that a closer working relationship is required with municipalities even at the operational level until it is shown that they have the capacity to be self regulatory.

An integrated monitoring program (resource to reticulation) has been developed for Delmas by my Department and is being funded and managed by my Department for the first six months (programme commenced in November 2005). The necessary skills for this activity are currently being transferred to the Delmas

Municipality and it is envisaged that this capacity will reside in the municipality in the near future. The presence and interaction of my Department with the Municipality the Provincial Department of Local Government Housing at the regular Joint Operations Committee meetings also fosters the ideals of co-operative governance.

To alleviate poverty and to ensure equitable access to water services by all people, we have to ensure that the Free Basic Water Policy is 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 Mpumalanga is faced with serious challenges especially in the former homeland areas, where large regional schemes exist with a history of non payment, little demand management and high water losses. The extreme levels of poverty in these areas also require that effective policies are implemented as a matter of priority.

Although my Department is supporting the Bucket eradication programme in the Province, there are concerns about the upgrading 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 for expansion. You must also ensure that your projects are financially viable and that you have the necessary skills and resources to operate and maintain the services, particularly in areas where the majority of the community is reliant on free basic services.

The transfer of water services schemes and staff to Municipalities has not progressed as well as planned. I am, however, informed that Nkomazi and Mbombela Local Municipalities have taken full transfer, and that the Operation and Maintenance of this infrastructure is progressing well. While I have also been advised that all other Municipalities have committed to take transfer and processes are underway to finalise the transfers I must emphasise the very urgent need to finalise all transfer agreements by the 31 March 2006.

In our transition from water services provider to a regulator, my Department will provide hands-on support to municipalities to improve their Water Services Development Plans, to implement demand management and conservation measures, and to use their Municipal Infrastructure Grants (MIG) 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.

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 attain our common objective of alleviating pain from the lives of our people and bring stability and prosperity.

“Let there be Water for sustainable growth and development for all in Mpumalanga.”

Thank you.