

North West Water Summit
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Mmabatho Convention Centre, Mafikeng
19 January 2006

Programme Director
Premier: Edna Molewa
MEC: Developmental Local Government and Housing, Mr Penye Vilakazi
Members of the Executive Council
Mayors and Councillors
Distinguished guests
Departmental officials
Magosi a rona
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I stand here before you at the beginning of yet another year that also promises to bring about events that will contribute to changing lives of our communities for the better.

As we all know and agree, Water is life, without Water, there would be no economy, no services of any kind, and indeed no life at all. Managing this resource to meet the Developmental challenges of this Province to give a better life for all as espoused in the Freedom Charter should be a priority.

Most of you are aware of the legislative framework that guides the provision and management of water. The White Paper, which was developed in 1995, laid a basis for the Water Services Act of 1997 and later the National Water Act of 1998. The fundamental principle of both pieces legislations is that water belongs to the people of South Africa. It is therefore the responsibility of my Department to ensure that this resource is managed in a sustainable manner for the social and economic benefit of all our people.

Whilst we are proud of the progress made with regard to the provision of basic water and to some extent, sanitation services, we still have millions of people in this Province without access to such services. In addition to challenges of provision of this service, we have to ensure that we address past inequities in allocation of water resources.

I must start by reminding you all again that South Africa is a water scarce country. Because we really try to manage water well, we sometimes forget that we are on the edge of what is internationally defined as water scarcity in terms of how little water we have available per person.

Because we are so short of water, we must ensure that we get as much benefit from its use as possible. That means we have to be careful and efficient in the way we use water and we need to be clever too – internationally they talk about how to get ‘more crop per drop’. We must think about how to get ‘more jobs per drop’ and ‘more products per drop’. We also need to protect our water because pollution leads to water shortage.

Ensuring conservation, sustainability and future access and effective management of the water resources now and in the future imposes an obligation on us to educate our people about these issues, especially our children. My Department’s 2020 Vision for Water and Sanitation Education Programme is also aimed at creating awareness among learners regarding the importance of effective water resource management and conservation. To effectively achieve this, a memorandum of co-operation has been signed between our department, different government departments, municipalities, water boards and other key partners in the province and to reinforce the need for water conservation and management. This is aimed to foster collective responsibility and accountability for the resource.

The National Water Resources Strategy provides the blueprint for the future of my Department and for the protection, preservation, conservation, development and effective management of our precious water resources.

In response to our President's call to improve the growth rate of our economy, we need to look carefully at the role which water can play in stimulating economic growth in this Province. Therefore, one of the major aims of gathering here is therefore to consider how water can contribute to your economic and social development programmes.

The three spatial development initiatives as reflected in your Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) namely: the platinum corridor, the Treasure corridor and the Western corridor have a great potential in giving effect to eradication of poverty and improving the lives of all, but will also put pressure on the available water resources as the province can be classified as Water stressed.

My Department is also actively involved in the North West PGDS structures. They provide support and inputs in the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy in order for it to realise its main objective.

At the PGDS summit held in August 2004, the following growth and economic development pillars were identified by yourselves,

- Growth and Investment pillar
- Agriculture and Rural Development pillar
- Mining and Energy
- Manufacturing
- Tourism
- Construction and Infrastructure
- SMME
- Training and Skills development

The Agriculture and Rural development as well as the Mining pillars are very water intensive. As a department we will have to make sure that in our water re allocation programme we attain equitable allocation of water to promote resource poor farmers. The water allocation reform also aims to achieve sustainable and equitable development, to support poverty eradication and economic development and to help balance resource protection, and economic growth. In line with the National Water Act Principle that seeks to ensure that water resources are managed locally, my Department is in the process of establishing various institutions that will carry out this function.

You are probably aware that we are in the process of establishing Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs). These are responsible for the management of the water resources in the province. Co-ordination through appropriate structures will be key in giving effect to meaningful support to the economic growth of the province. Catchment Management Agencies will manage Water Management Areas. With respect to those catchments within the North West Province, the establishment of the Crocodile (West) Marico CMA has been approved and a notice to this effect has appeared in the Government Gazette. The appointment of the Advisory Committee to assist me with the identification of stakeholders to serve in the Governing Board of this CMA is also imminent.

We are anxious to ensure that the Irrigation Boards managing the Government Water Schemes, which we are in the process of transforming to Water User Associations, could contribute to your programme. And indeed, we believe that the Water User Associations may be able to provide effective structures through which partnerships between commercial and emerging farmers can be established, as has happened elsewhere in the country. We know that successful and efficient

farming is a challenging business and we get all the help we can to ensure that our new farmers are successful.

In 2004, I announced a policy on how my Department can assist resource poor irrigation farmers through various subsidies. I hope that during this summit we will discuss how this water can be used to make practical progress to achieve your goals on agricultural development and land reform processes.

In this Province my Department has provided subsidies to more than 100 resource poor farmers on our irrigation schemes (Hartebeespoort Irrigation Board and the Vaalharts WUA) have Subsidies where of approximately R2,5 million was made available for the payment of operation and maintenance costs.

The North West Provincial Growth and Development Strategy outlines the following elements, from a Water and Sanitation perspective:

- To promote equal and fair access to basic services
- Achieve sustainable resource usage and sustainable environmental protection
- Achieve co-operative governance and promote partnerships
- Promote Small, Medium and Micro enterprise development
- Launch Spatial Development Initiatives

Furthermore, the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy states that, to give effect to your developmental objectives, some of the targets to be reached by 2014 include:

- To grow the economy at 6,6% per annum on average over 10 years
- Must promote employment creation of 45,400 per annum
- Must facilitate skills development of 7,665 per annum
- To deliver water to at least 34 686 households per annum
- Sanitation delivery to at least 73 549 households per annum
- The delivery of at least 17 657 housing units per annum

It is, therefore, important that National Government supports the Province and Local Governments in your aspirations to reach your economic growth, job creation and related targets.

I also need to highlight the successes that have been achieved by government, nationally and North West in particular, especially with regards to provision of services to our people and support to municipalities.

At a national level we can proudly say that significant progress has already been achieved during the first 10 years of our democracy. Nationally, my Department has served 10,5 m people with water.

However, the poor face significant service delivery shortfalls despite the noteworthy progress made to date. You have done very well since 1994 in providing basic water supply to 1,2 million people previously living in formerly unserved households, as well as providing basic sanitation to 68 000 households. The delivery of Sanitation especially to the rural communities is not satisfactory. More concerted effort and resource commitments are needed to accelerate rural sanitation delivery.

Of course, providing infrastructure is only the start of providing water supply and sanitation. Good management of operations is critical if we are to avoid not only dry taps, blocked toilets and polluted rivers, but more specifically prevent typhoid and cholera.

With respect to the challenge of sanitation, you will know that, in co-operation with the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the National Treasury, we have made R1, 2 billion nationally available over the next three years to eliminate the bucket system once and for all.

We are all aware of the challenges facing some municipalities in the Province where they experience problems with the management of sewage treatment works and water purification plants. It is the responsibility of each municipality to ensure proper planning, budgeting and management of such infrastructure to prevent service delivery breakdowns, pollution incidents and worst of all, endanger the health of its communities.

I have said it before and will repeat here that the sanitation standards for different settlements should be chosen carefully. Choice of technology should be driven by availability of water and more importantly, the appropriateness of the technology for a particular community. It is the responsibility of each municipality to ensure that planning, budgeting and management of any sanitation infrastructure is done properly and in a sustainable manner. Make sure that existing water supply and sewage treatment infrastructure can accommodate sanitation options provided.

One other key lesson in the water sector in the last five years is the power of collaboration. An approach that incorporates a high level of co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration has been adopted in this region through the formation of the North West Water Sector Committee. This is a forum where government departments, municipalities and other sector stakeholders interact to plan and develop strategies to effectively manage water services and resources.

My Department will continue to support project consolidate activities, a strategy for our support has been developed and communicated to the project consolidate team. There are currently 15 declared project consolidates municipalities in the NW and I am aware that considerable progress has been made. I would however encourage other municipalities that are not falling under the current project consolidate list, to consider adopting the project consolidate principles as this can only result in even better service delivery.

In closing, it gives me great excitement and pleasure to launch the department's TOLL FREE LINE. I challenge and encourage all of you as consumers of water and members of various Water Services Institutions to utilize this facility. Essentially, the service has two primary goals; viz. for municipalities, it seeks to provide on demand support; and for citizens, it seeks to provide an avenue for their concerns and contribute to the protection of their rights. The number is 0800 200 200.

The concept of an accessible ONE STOP SHOP of support services was endorsed over a year ago and after much hard work has come to fruition. I'm therefore happy to announce that the first stage of services will be available in the form of this Toll Free Line.

Today, I implore you to openly and honestly interrogate the challenges, which we face in the water and sanitation sectors in the certain knowledge that the solutions to the challenges are within our grasp.

Let this water summit be used to ensure that we reach our common goals with regard to the water sector.

I THANK YOU.