

Western Cape Water Summit
Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Goudini Spa
10 March 2006

I am pleased to be here with you today at the last of the regional summits we have been having since last year. Fortunately, this summit comes right after the World Water Forum held recently in Mexico where my Department shared experiences with other countries from all parts of the world. From debates held at this important forum, we came back with a strong view that as a country, we seem to be on the right track with regards to our Water Policies. We were repeatedly mentioned as one of the countries with progressive water policies; however, a lot of work still needs to be done in the area of implementation. This is one of the reasons why we have been having summits throughout the country, to jointly identify areas where we need to make improvements and come up with strategies to address those in a coordinated manner.

As you have heard in the introduction, we intend to forge a greater spirit of partnership and synergy' as the three spheres of government towards much improved service delivery. We have in this province, your typical first economy thriving in the midst of the second economy. We have in this province, people living in informal areas endangered by constant shack fires where nobody feels safe. We are concerned about communities who, besides being poor, cannot even enjoy a good night's sleep without having to wake up to check for safety against fires or flooding. Addressing these issues requires strong partnerships and commitment by all. I am therefore encouraged and humbled by the presence of all of you here.

Whilst my Department is responsible for formulation and implementation of policy and support to local government in delivery of water and sanitation, it also has a huge responsibility to ensure that there is water to support growth and development, today, tomorrow and forever. In order to provide all South Africans with access to clean water and safe sanitation, we promote effective and efficient water resources management.

Government has made ambitious commitments to our people which include eradicating the bucket system by next year, providing all households with clean water by 2008, eradicating the sanitation backlog by 2010 and providing free basic services.

My department is putting together a refined and integrated support programme to strengthen municipal capacity to deliver the much needed water, forestry and sanitation services delivery.

During the past years this province has been affected by drought that has to date, affected many people. Drought relief funding was provided by government but many municipalities have not yet fully utilized this funding. Our President in his SONA has also stated that there is a need for "a realistic integrated development plan" by municipalities. Integration of planning and implementation across the government spheres is therefore one of the prime areas of focus in our programme for the next term of local government. In this regard we will be guided by the "Inter-Governmental Relations Act." My Department is assisting with the planning process which is supportive of and aligned to the IDP engagement process being undertaken by the municipalities

Ladies and gentlemen, this is definitely not another talk show, what emanates from this summit will result in a Provincial Water Sector Plan for this province. Such a plan should indicate how municipalities would deal with amongst other challenges, water conservation through Water Demand Management Programmes. I believe that this is being implemented in many of the municipalities with good results. I may be preaching to the converted but seeing that we also have new political and technical water sector team members with us today, I want to re-emphasise the need to increase our water use efficiencies. I would like to see a linkage between summit results and the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy, the Spatial Development Framework and the Strategic Infrastructure Plan. These should all be part of the Provincial Water Sector Plan for the Western Cape.

I can say with confidence that the management of the water resources of the country is in line with principles advocated for globally, i.e. management through co-operative governance and creation of locally based institutions like Catchment Management Agencies. The Western Cape is involved in a number of such initiatives. Together with the City of Cape Town, the West Coast, Drakenstein and Overberg District Municipalities, local authorities and irrigators along the Berg, Eerste and Riviersonderend Rivers, we manage the extensive Western Cape Water Supply System, which serves this urban and agricultural economic hub of the Western Cape. This is an example of the importance of partnerships and working together. You will recall that during the recent drought we had to apply water restrictions to ensure the long term sustainability of the supply before the Berg Water Project is completed.

I would like to thank all the authorities for their co-operation in meeting their saving targets and urge you and other municipalities to continue to implement water conservation and demand management measures. I would like to see municipalities coming up with much more aggressive campaigns of saving water and this is an area where I see the potential role of Civic Society and our youth. The approval of the Berg River Project by my Department was conditional to the City embarking on and maintaining a comprehensive water conservation and demand management programme to reduce consumption by 20% below the unrestricted growth projection.

The imposition of restrictions during the drought provided an excellent opportunity to combine the short-term goals of the restriction strategy with the long-term goals of sustained water saving and wise water use. The Berg Water Project is being implemented by the TCTA on behalf of my Department and will be paid for by water sales to the City and to any other users who purchase water from this source. The construction is on schedule to first deliver water during the winter of 2007 and for completion later that year. Allow me to mention some of the other water development projects we are busy with:

- We are also involved in the Department of Agriculture's study of opportunities to improve the efficiency of water utilization from the Stompdrift and Kammanassie Dams near Oudtshoorn in the Klein Karoo and hence to reduce poverty in the area.
- In view of the rapid urban development that is taking place along the Garden Route between Stilbaai and Plettenberg Bay, we have recently commenced a study to assess the water requirements, the available supplies and the possibilities for their augmentation. The environmental reserves of some of the rivers are also being assessed.
- The Dam Safety office has recognized that there is a need to strengthen the Clanwilliam Dam in the Olifants/Doorn Water Management Area. My Department is undertaking a study to assess whether this might provide the opportunity to economically raise the dam so as to supply water to resource poor farmers and to improve the assurance of the supply to the irrigators downstream. The Department of Agriculture is closely involved in this investigation, which follows on their investigation of possible schemes on the Doring River.

In terms of the National Water resources strategy, my department has followed the natural river system boundaries in this province to divide it into 4 larger Water Management Areas (WMA). These are from east to west and named after the main river systems in the area viz the Gouritz, Breede, Berg and the Olifants-Doorn WMA's. In our attempt to begin to understand the water status in each of these WMA's, we have now completed a major planning exercise in each of these WMA's to determine the available water, the total water use, the water needs of the environment as well the projected needs of water users within a stipulated time period.

Later on in this summit you will be able to get further insight into these plans and some details of what the findings in this study were. As part of the future management of water in these Water management areas, my department is developing catchment management agencies. These CMA's will carry out many of my department's functions focusing mainly on operational water management within the boundaries of the WMA's on an agency basis either by delegated, devolved or assigned authority. In this Province I am pleased to say that proposals to introduce CMA's in all of the WMA's are in the advanced stages with the Breede River CMA being promulgated in 2005 and the board members to be appointed within few months time. My department would then regulate the CMA board to ensure that the government imperatives are

being carried out to the benefit of all water users in the WMA. The Gouritz and Olifants-Doorn CMA development proposals are scheduled to be approved by my department within this year. The last of the CMA to be established will be the Berg River CMA that will be finalized towards the end of next year.

Other water resource institutions being established by my department are the Water User Associations I referred to earlier. These institutions or associations are designed to be multi sectoral management boards where scheme related issues on water are discussed and decided upon side by side with issues of equity in water use and development. Resource poor farmers together with commercial farmers come together with farm workers who are also represented on these boards to share and utilize their water resource in an equitable and sustainable manner to the benefit of all water users in their area. There are areas of serious concern regarding transformation and change management in these newly established institutions, and we are very committed to making sure that the objectives of setting these institutions are met.

Some of you may be aware of the Water Allocation Reform (WAR) programme which we launched last year. This programme is geared to the reallocation of our limited water resources to the benefit of those that never had the privilege of having water allocated to them for economic development before. By its nature, it is important that this programme must also be strategically aligned to the land reform process as well as the agricultural reform process. We are now more than 10 years into our democracy and we have not created adequate opportunities for resource poor farmers to use water for their economic advancement. WAR is a very important programme that seeks to contribute to ASGI-SA initiatives and I would therefore like to appeal to all of you for co-operation.

I am well aware of the issues in this Province regarding the water quality in our river systems. Last week when we launched our National Water Week I was encouraged by the work being done by schools in the Gouritz area. This project by the Eden District municipality is called the 'Adopt a River Campaign' where schools carry out monitoring and assessment of a river system to determine what its status is and what can be done to improve its health. I would like to encourage all of you today to emulate the Eden District Municipality and to adopt a river where our schools can become intimately involved in playing an active role in improving our environment while they learn the varied and complex ecosystems that exist around us.

My department together with the agency of the Provincial Department of Environment and development planning and the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board, have a river health programme to study river systems and report on the status of river health. I am informed that this intergovernmental memorandum of agreement is well established in this Province and should continue. These status reports would then provide the basis to influence land use activities around these rivers such that the desired health status of the river under scrutiny is maintained or improved as the need may be.

Having said this ladies and gentlemen, my Department is extremely worried about pollution of our rivers that is a result of municipalities that fail to operate and maintain their infrastructure properly. I would like to urge all municipalities to plan and budget for maintenance of infrastructure to avoid bad incidents like Delmas. I am also aware that this region is one of the first in the country to implement a Drinking water quality programme. I must commend this Province for having taken up this challenge to monitor and evaluate our drinking water quality on a regular basis to maintain a high quality drinking water in our taps.

I would also like to make reference to illegal water use. This practice is also of concern to my department and we intend taking serious measures against people who use water illegally, abstract and store water without the necessary permits. Illegal water use is a criminal offence and perpetrators can be prosecuted. We are embarking on a Country wide undertaking to root out these illegal water use activities. We are now as a department, able to obtain a good understanding of who are our water users and what quantities of water are being utilized and where. We have also completed a comprehensive registration of water use exercise and our water use database can inform us on what water are being used legally and illegally.

I am looking forward to Provincial Water Sector (PWSP) which will be a planning tool aimed at meeting policy and strategy requirements of the Province. The process for developing a Provincial Water Sector Plan for this region will adopt an approach which will be in keeping with the Inter Governmental Framework imperatives. The scope of the PWSP will not be limited to DWAF functions and targets but will encompass the priorities and needs of the water sector as a whole. It will look at the provision of water (WS & WR) services by the water sector in the province.

I am very encouraged to see the committed partnership of all Departments and partners who have not only dug the trenches for this summit but also climbed into it with my department in trying to get all the Water service authorities to this summit. My sincere gratitude to all of you who have prioritized this summit. I make a commitment to work with you in ensuring sustainable management of the water resource in this Province. My Department will not rest until the last person has been served with water sanitation services.

I want thank you for your participation in this summit and I am looking forward to a Provincial Water sector plan for this Province in the not too distant future.

May you have a good Easter this weekend and travel safely.

I thank you.