

Launch of National Water Week and the De Hoop Dam
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Ma-Seven, Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality, Limpopo
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Premier Moloto
Mayors of Tubatse and Sekhukhune District Municipality
Councillors
Kgosi
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

I am very pleased to be here in Sekhukhune and excited to be launching the De Hoop Dam. Today's event is also the launch of our National Water Week for 2007 – a very important week in our calendar because it creates awareness about the importance of water and the many challenges we face in South Africa and indeed across the world in providing water to people.

There is a lot for us to be excited about today as this new dam will transform the lives of the people in this region. It will do so by creating the infrastructure so that we can provide water to communities that have long had to struggle for water; the dam will also create local jobs in the construction of the dam, the related water infrastructure, and in the building of roads; and the dam will mean that mines can be established, which will create additional jobs and opportunities for the local communities.

2. Background to the Project

Ladies and Gentlemen, as you well know water is a matter of huge concern in the Limpopo Province, with the average level of dams in the province at 59%; with the Albasini and Middel-Letaba Dams at 46% and 26% full. Over the past decade, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has investigated various options within the Middle Olifants River Catchment to meet the projected water demands in the area. And our engineers found a suitable site on the Steelpoort River on the farm De Hoop for the construction of a new dam.

The Olifants River Water Resource Development Project was then commissioned to achieve an increased assurance of water supply, and is part of Government's aim to secure bulk water for domestic supply purposes; to stimulate economic activity, and to promote the socio-economic development of the people of this part of Limpopo Province in concert with the Growth and Development Strategy and the Spatial Development Framework of the Limpopo Province.

Phase 1 of the Project was the raising of the Flag Boshielo Dam by five metres and was completed at the end of last year. This part of the project was closely aligned to the mining sector in this area, which has been developing over the last few years but lack of water hampered further development. The prosperity of this area is closely linked to this industry as it results in the creation of employment opportunities and economic growth; and water is the catalyst for this development. The local mining sector was pro-active with support for securing water and spent millions of rand on the Lebalelo water pipeline from the Olifants River to the Steelpoort area. The mines have also carried the cost for the raising of the Flag Boshielo Dam.

The construction of this dam is the second phase of the Olifants River Water Resource Development Project and was first announced by President Thabo Mbeki in 2003 as one of the flagship programmes of Government's Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGI-SA). The importance of this Dam is twofold; the first is to supply water to the towns, industries and poorly serviced rural communities in the Sekhukhune District of the Limpopo Province. Secondly, the Dam is to supply water to the mines that will help to unlock vast mineral deposits, mainly in the form of platinum group metals found in the region. These metals are at present the largest known unexploited mineral wealth in our country.

The construction of the De Hoop Dam and the associated bulk water distribution infrastructure will cost R5 billion (at present value), and Municipalities in the area, supported by the National and Provincial Government, are preparing to invest an additional R3 billion on infrastructure to treat and distribute potable water to rural domestic and urban users. More than 800 000 people in the project area will benefit by improved domestic water supply when the availability of water from the Dam is secured.

The planning for the construction of the Dam is well underway and construction is to start in the second quarter of this year to see the first impoundment of water during the 2009/2010 rainy season.

3. Impact of the Dam on the Community and Environment

Programme director, I have been told that in the past the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry went in and built dams, little consideration was given to the environment, local communities, or the heritage of the area and archaeological issues. Today the situation is very different and all of these issues, and more, have been taken into account so that the local communities benefit from this massive investment in their area, while at the same time we ensure that the concerns about the environment are taken into account.

On the environmental issues the Department's position is that nature has a right to water, which is fundamentally recognised in the National Water Act and is also underscored by the National Water Resources Strategy in which the highest priority for water is given to subsistence use by humans together with sustaining the environment.

The sustaining of rivers and livelihoods is provided for through the Reserve. All existing entitlements are fully recognised whilst socio-economic and other investigations were conducted to ensure the most beneficial use of water and sharing of benefits. Compliance after implementation will be ensured and the sharing of the resource with co-basin countries is well covered by the existing protocols and agreements to which South Africa fully complies.

Detailed scientific studies have also been conducted on the volumes of water required, and at what times, to meet the requirements for the environment in various parts of the Olifants River Catchment - including the Kruger National Park. The De Hoop Dam has consequently been planned and designed to fully meet the downstream environmental requirements in the Steelpoort River. The dam will mainly retain flood waters and will in fact significantly improve flow conditions downstream during the low flow season as well as during droughts.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to understand the community needs we embarked upon an extensive public participation programme. We found that it was necessary for the project to maximise business and job opportunities in the region, with related skills training opportunities during the construction period. We also identified that the development will stimulate tourism opportunities and in the longer term many socio-economic benefits are predicted to be brought about by having increased water availability in this extremely dry region of our country. Apart from the direct permanent employment opportunities that will be created by the project, mining and its support industries will stimulate investment of more than R15 billion and create about 90 000 sustainable jobs. The anticipated additional salaries and wages resulting from economic development in the area are estimated to be in excess of R2 billion per year.

What is critical is that these benefits are shared and principles of Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment are addressed. It is also necessary that there is skills development in line with the Joint Initiative for Skills Acquisition (JIPSA).

To achieve these goals a Socio Economic Development Framework between the provincial government, the district municipality and my department was drafted. The aim of this agreement, which we will be signing today, is to address job creation, skills development and the advancement of Broad-Based BEE. This framework stipulates that contractors must provide employment in line with Government's objectives, with a special emphasis on job opportunities for women, the youth and the disabled. The project's aim is, however, not only local job creation but skills transfer that will result in long-term benefits. Training will also focus on capacity building that it is hands on and on-the-job-training to give those without special skills an opportunity to develop.

We are setting minimum percentages of the labour force be from local communities and we are also proposing the establishment of a labour desk to ensure fair and transparent recruitment of local labour. Importantly we are looking to support local businesses, small business and BEE businesses through this project by stipulating that a percentage of the contracts are procured from these businesses.

4. National Water Week

Ladies and Gentlemen, the availability of water is a key factor in the growth of our economy and in the alleviation of poverty in South Africa. Our water therefore needs to be protected, conserved and used with care, as socio-economic development is dependent on this valuable resource.

The theme for this year's National Water Week is "Water is life – protect our scarce resources". And on Thursday this week it is World Water Day, where people from across the world will look at how to cope with water scarcity, the importance of conserving water, and the necessity for water resources to be developed in such a way that we take the needs of different communities and different concerns into account.

Every year during Water Week we make the public aware of the importance of water – in particular water quality, quantity and reserves – and the progress that Government is making in providing water for all. Many of you will have seen or heard our messages in the media.

With its low rainfall, compared to most other countries in the world, South Africa is regarded as a dry country. We have an average of 450 mm rain per year in comparison with the international average of 860 mm per year, and with our very hot climate which contributes to a high rate of evaporation, we need to be very cautious with our water resources especially as sustained economic development, growth in human population, and the urgent need to supply basic water services to millions of people have led to an increasing demand for water.

For this reason, everyone needs to adopt a strategic change in the use and conservation of our water resources to ensure some water for all, forever.

Everyone can make an input and a difference with regard to the efficient use of water. Conserving water is the responsibility of all in South Africa – every drop counts. Water conservation starts at home. All citizens must ensure that they act responsibly when using water, since excessive water use will prevent us as a nation to enjoy the benefits of the principle of *some for all, forever*. We do not have unlimited water in our country. Already we have parts of the country that experience droughts. We should, therefore, not take the available water for granted. If a tap is dripping fix it or ask somebody to help you fix. A dripping tap can waste as much as 60 litres a day.

Another of the important messages of this Water Week is that we must become water safe, for example when using dams and rivers for recreations purposes. The loss of life in a dam through negligence or not knowing how to swim is entirely preventable, and in bringing this resource here we should also see to it that members of the community are able use the dam safely so that they do not lose loved ones and animals.

6. Conclusion

To conclude programme director, the construction of the De Hoop Dam forms part of Government's continued efforts to eradicate poverty and bring about a better life for all South Africans. Today marks progress by Government in its effort to supply access to water in line with its constitutional mandate to achieve the progressive realisation of the rights of South Africans to water.

As we celebrate Human Rights Day, which takes place this Wednesday, Government is committed to keeping its promise of delivering access to water.

To achieve the social cohesion and solidarity we seek as a nation, we must confront the legacy of poverty, the lack of infrastructure and resources that was denied to millions of our people. It is for this reason that today marks an important milestone – it is indicative of how we as a country, from different backgrounds, from the private and the public sectors, and from the surrounding communities, have come together to ensure that our people have greater access to services and job opportunities.

We embrace the theme of National Water Week – *Amanzi Ayimpilo!* We should manage our natural resources responsibly and protect them. Water offers us life, economic opportunities and a future of improved skill and capacity.

I thank you.