

2007/08 Pre-Budget Vote Press Briefing
Media Briefing by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
15 May 2007

1. Introduction

Thank you for joining me this morning at this pre budget vote press briefing. This week I will be presenting my first budget speech as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry. Today's press briefing gives us an opportunity to discuss some of the challenges in the water, sanitation and forestry sectors and the work of the department in these sectors. With a budget of R5.3 billion and over 16 000 employees, DWAF is by comparison a sizable department and it has an important mandate.

2. Water Resources and Water Services

Allow me to start out with a very brief overview of the water sector. At the outset it is necessary to understand the water value chain so that it is clear where the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) fits in and the role of other partners in the water sector such as municipalities. The institutional structure in the water sector can at first glance be quite complex.

Our water sources include rivers, streams, groundwater and rain; and with South Africa being a water stressed country (we receive less than half the world average of rainfall) we have to protect our water resources and be aware of our water consumption. Climate change, droughts and higher temperatures, such as what we experienced this past summer, will have a negative impact on water availability and is of concern to us. DWAF has the responsibility to monitor these water sources, and has powers under the National Water Act to ensure that these water resources are not polluted. Our limited availability of water means that water conservation and water demand management are very important areas of work for DWAF. Falling under the broad banner of water conservation and protecting our water resources is the Working for Water programme, which is an Expanded Public Works Programme that uses community labour to remove alien invasive species.

From these water sources we capture or contain the water into dams, and from there the water is taken to water treatment plants for cleaning. The water in rivers and dams are what we call raw water and therefore cannot be safely consumed by people. It is only once the water has been taken to water schemes for treatment that it is fit for human consumption. These water schemes are bulk water suppliers and operated by Water Boards, DWAF, or sometimes Municipalities which are Water Services Authorities. The treated water is then sold to Municipalities who then reticulate to households. Note that in rural areas and in the agriculture sector the institutional arrangements are different.

Most of the large dams fall under DWAF's responsibility (although they are usually managed in collaboration with other departments and with local government) and you will note in this year's budget that there is a significant

allocation towards dam construction and maintenance of infrastructure. The De Hoop Dam is one of our priority projects over the next few years.

While Municipalities are responsible for reticulation of water to households, DWAF as the 'sector leader' works closely with municipalities to provide support and ensure that there is roll out of access to water. DWAF is also responsible for ensuring that municipalities maintain a high level of drinking water quality. We have implemented a drinking water quality management system, which will be on show at the DWAF exhibition on Thursday; this system sees municipalities supplying data on drinking water quality, which enables us to identify possible problems and work with the affected municipality to resolve these problems. We have a number of engineers that have been seconded to municipalities to provide them with support, and we also have other capacity building initiatives for municipalities.

The water value chain continues with removal of waste water by municipalities, and taken to treatment plants. The water is then treated and released back into the rivers. DWAF works closely with Municipalities to ensure that their systems are effective and that raw sewage is not released into water sources as this can have negative consequences on the environment and people's health.

Most of you would be aware of the targets that have been set by government in the water and sanitation area, these include:

- Bucket eradication in the formal established settlements by December 2007
- Eradication of the water and sanitation backlog in clinics by 2007
- Eradication of the backlog in schools by 2008/9
- Eradication of water supply backlog by 2008
- Eradication of general sanitation backlog 2010

As we rollout water and sanitation services and get closer to meeting these targets the lack of infrastructure is becoming a challenge. My department has thus decided to establish a special programme for water services bulk infrastructure, which includes wastewater treatments plants. This programme will come into operation during this financial year and a grant amount of R1.4 billion has been allocated over the next three years.

Meeting the targets that I have just mentioned is a priority for the government, and over the past few weeks I have held sanitation summits in North West and Eastern Cape to ensure that the first target we have set of bucket eradication in the formal established settlements is achieved. Last year I held a similar summit in the Free State. These three provinces are the most affected by the bucket system. It is important to clearly state that while we look forward to eradicating buckets in these formal established settlements by the end of this year – we do not expect that they will be entirely eradicated because we are faced with a continuous challenge of new informal settlements emerging (sometimes overnight). This 'moving target' will remain until the challenges of housing have been met.

The budget of R1.9 billion allocated in this financial year just on water and sanitation services is in addition to the substantial resources made available to Municipalities through the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) programme, and will go a long way in ensuring that we meet our targets.

That in a very summarised way provides an overview of work of DWAF in the water services and water resources areas. During our discussions we could look at some of the detail or specific programmes of the department such as the different weeks we have – Water, Sanitation, Arbour and Weedbuster Weeks; our youth development initiatives such as Baswa le Meetse; our Water Allocation Reform programme which seeks to redress historical water allocations; our programme to support resource poor farmers; or the plans we have to establish a national water resources infrastructure agency.

3. Forestry

The Forestry sector is an important contributor to GDP and employment (it employs close to 170 000 people and contributes more than R16 billion annually to the South African economy). The impact of the sector is felt particularly in rural areas and there is significant scope for this sector to expand and thereby contribute towards uplifting those in the second economy.

Over the past few years a great deal of work has been done in our forestry sector to improve yields, to restructure institutions, improve community access and to redefine government's role in the forestry sector. Our biggest challenges in forestry are to achieve broad based BEE in the sector, and to expand our forest resources. The Forestry Broad-Based BEE Charter, which is now ready to be launched, recognises the link between transformation of the sector and growth of the sector. Through the Strategic Environmental Assessments that have been conducted we are confident that at least 100 000 hectares of new commercial forests can be planted over the next ten years.

In my budget speech I will look at the role of DWAF in providing a vision for this sector, and the need to address some of the constraints inhibiting the growth of this sector, such as speeding up water licence applications for commercial forests and resolving the outstanding land claims.

Our forestry programme also encompasses greening and planting of trees, which we will be expanding.

The critical issue of fires are also a priority area for us, where we are running the Working on Fire programme and encouraging the establishment of fire protection associations.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, after my first 90 days in office I held a press conference in Pretoria to outline some of the challenges I found in the department. At that

press conference I made a number of commitments to the press, I would like to reiterate these commitments:

Before my term of office is completed I am committing to:

- 1) Ensuring that women are firmly in the driving seat in forestry and water, not only as recipients of water, but as empowered owners of their own enterprises, as leaders and as managers. I also commit to the establishment of an organisation for women in the water and sanitation sector to contribute to the empowerment and capacity building of women in this sector.
- 2) Driving the process of restructuring of the Department through the establishment of the National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency, the catchment management agencies, and the transfer of forests and water schemes. I hope to leave behind a lean and mean and much smaller Department that is clearly focused on its role as sector leader for forestry and water, functioning as a regulator and supporter of other institutions in these sectors.
- 3) Ensuring that the demeaning bucket toilets in the formal established settlements are eradicated and that all schools and clinics have adequate water and sanitation
- 4) Ensuring that we have well developed programmes to find the skills that we need in the water and forestry sectors, now and in the future. To this end my department will continue to drive the 2025 capacity building programme for the water sector, working together with all relevant players in the water sector for a coherent, comprehensive and successful programme
- 5) Ensuring that the forestry charter is finalised and implementation well under way and that the transformation of this sector benefits the poor and the marginalized in rural areas
- 6) Ensuring that my Department receives a clean audit!

I thank you.