

Launch of the National Water Conservation and Water Demand Indaba
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Gallagher Estate, Midrand, Gauteng
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Executive Mayor of the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council
Ms Connie September Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Water Affairs and Forestry
in the National Assembly
Professor Biswas
Honourable guests
Ladies and gentlemen

1. Introduction

In the thirteen years since democracy, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has provided more than twelve million South Africans with access to clean water - in doing so South Africa has more than achieved the rate of delivery required to meet the Millennium Declaration set by the Heads of State at the United Nations in 2000. At that meeting, President Thabo Mbeki, together with 100 other Heads of State, committed to halving the proportion of people lacking safe water in the world by 2015.

The target that we have set ourselves in South Africa goes beyond these Millennium Development Goals and we are targeting universal access to clean water by 2008. Achieving this target would see a further 7.2 million people having access to clean water by 2008. We are also targeting adequate sanitation for all by 2010. Providing access to sanitation and clean water is undoubtedly a critical measure in reducing poverty in our country.

Living in a country that has scarce water resources and poor infrastructure in rural areas and townships requires us to be very circumspect in how we approach our targets and in the technology we use.

"Coping with water scarcity" as the theme for 2007 World Water Day is therefore apt for South Africa, which is one of the top thirty driest countries in the world. We have an estimated average of less than a 1 000 cubic metres of water per person per annum, which is quite low by international standards. It puts us clearly as a water stressed country as over 1700 cubic metres per person per annum is considered enough not to be in water stress or have water scarcity. In addition, the current climatic conditions that we are experiencing makes water scarcity a daily reality for many in our country. The challenge of climate change is that we are likely to see a reduction of rainfall in some parts of South Africa and to see an increase the intensity of droughts and floods.

Despite these challenges, we cannot fail our people in their quest for a better life. We need to give them water and we need to ensure that water plays its role in our socio-economic development. It is therefore a priority for us to manage our water so that we are able to balance the social needs of our people, especially those who have been denied access to water in the past, with our economic needs, as water is a key ingredient in economic growth.

In an example of how we are trying to create this balance I would like to use the occasion of this speech to announce that I have made a volume of 60 million cubic metres of water available from the Pongolapoort Dam for a sugar development project on the Makhathini Flats. The feasibility studies for this project will still need to be conducted over the next two years, with a view to development taking place afterwards. A Water User Association will need to be established with the prospective community farmers and the water use licence will be issued to them once sugarcane supply agreements are signed by the farmers.

2. Water Scarcity

Ladies and Gentlemen, for our own National Water Week we have adopted the theme “Water is life – protect our scarce resources”. This theme is in line with the World Water Day theme, and was chosen because we need to create greater levels of awareness amongst South Africans that water is a scarce commodity and that its continuous availability in our rivers and taps should not be taken for granted.

The greater and increasing demands for water requires us to look at all available options to address our water needs. We are looking at new dams, and on Monday of this week I was launching the building of the De Hoop Dam which when completed will address the water needs of 800 000 people in Sekhukune, Limpopo, as well as the needs for the mines in that region. And there are no doubt other areas that have significant potential for new dams.

However, building dams and new infrastructure is not the only solution and we urgently need to re-look at how we use our water. Water Conservation and Water Demand Management have a crucial role to play in the future.

We have come a long way in our country in addressing the policy and legislative aspects of water use, but we still have a long way to walk in its effective implementation. We are particularly proud of our National Water Act (Act 36 of 1998), which has enshrined integrated water resources management into law and incorporates the principles of equity, sustainability and efficiency. The National Water Act as well as the Water Services Act provide an enabling environment for Water Conservation and Water Demand Management, and require role-players to integrate this approach into their strategic roles, responsibilities and activities.

3. Equity and Scarcity

Programme Director, our legislation also gives us a clear mandate to use water to redress the inequities of apartheid and to ensure that those historically disadvantaged, have access to water for domestic and productive purposes, whilst ensuring that water is utilised in a responsible and sustainable manner. To this end, my Department will be starting the compulsory licensing process in three of our most water stressed areas in the near future; the Mhlathuze Catchment in KwaZulu-Natal, the Inkomati Water Management Area in Mpumalanga and the Jan Dissels Catchment in the Western Cape. This process will level the playing fields; allowing all South Africans, who want to use water for productive purposes – for small scale irrigation projects, small businesses and large commercial enterprises – to apply for water for productive purposes on an equal basis.

We can then make sure that the water is shared on a more equitable basis and in a way that helps Government realise its developmental goals and provide redress for past inequality. But, to ensure that this process does not unfairly prejudice any users who want to contribute to economic growth and job creation, we must make sure that we make the most efficient use of all our water resources.

4. Water losses

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is through effective integrated water resources management that we can attempt to address the many needs for water in our country. One area that we need to give greater attention to is the significant water loss, wastages and inefficient use of water in the domestic, agriculture and industrial sectors, including mines and power generation. There is great scope for all of us to work together to improve the levels of water use efficiency across all water users. And I am pleased that Eskom has come on board as one of the sponsors of water week.

Water conservation must be factored into all steps of the water management cycle, from the very inception of the planning process, through the design, operation and de-commissioning of relevant schemes and projects. This is not just the function of Government, but the function of all water users. We should remember that water institutions should supply water efficiently and effectively, minimise water losses and promote Water Conservation and Water Demand Management among their consumers, while water users themselves, whether at the household level, or in industry or on the farms, should not waste water and should use it efficiently.

As the National trustee of the water resources of South Africa, my Department needs your active collaboration, buy-in and support in reaching the goal of using our water efficiently, and, in the words of the National Water Act, *“beneficially and in the public interest”*.

It would be ideal if we could achieve efficient water use without having to use punitive measures, and there are some water users who have been remarkably innovative in saving water and using it more efficiently. At the same time, there are still a large number of people who use water as if there was an endless supply. If necessary, we will use punitive measures or pricing to address this abuse! It is to this end that my Department is preparing regulations on water use efficiency.

5. Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Indaba

Ladies and Gentlemen, the purpose of this Indaba is to explore and delve deeper into the practical steps to accelerate the implementation of Water Conservation and Water Demand Management.

Issues that we should consider include:

- How best Government can create an enabling environment for improved water use efficiencies across all water use sectors;
- How best Business and Industry can begin, in earnest, a drive to manufacture water efficient devices and equipment for our market;
- How best Water Management and Water Services Institutions can facilitate the implementation of water conservation programmes in their areas of jurisdiction, be it through by-laws on water use, or better pressure management, or control over the quality and nature of fixtures in the distribution and retail supply infrastructure; and
- How best end users (industry, agriculture, communities) can make every effort to use water wisely, efficiently and beneficially.

I am aware, that some municipalities are doing an excellent job in implementing Water Conservation and Water Demand Management with wonderful results in water savings, reducing losses and encouraging users to become more efficient. Such information should not be limited to technical people and officials of Government. It is crucial for ordinary people to understand this and be an integral part of the solution.

Ordinary people have a right to know why, and how, we are implementing Water Conservation and Water Demand Management, as well as why we have to build dams. People also have experiences to share in how to conserve and manage water. In order to share this information and experiences my Department will be launching a National Water Conservation and Water Demand Management “Success Stories” publication to convey to everyone just what can be achieved when people put their minds to it.

I am also considering launching a National Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Ministerial Awards the aim of which would be to recognise water management institutions, water services institutions and water users that are making a significant improvement in their efficiency of water use.

6. Data on Water Losses

Programme director in order to be effective in our efforts to conserve water and in our Water Demand Management programme we must be able to monitor and measure our water use, our water wastage and water loss, far more accurately than we do now.

The Water Research Commission has recently completed a study of 62 municipalities looking at water losses; and the study estimates that if what is taking place in these municipalities were applied across the board; the losses for domestic water use through physical water losses, inaccurate meters, and unbilled and unauthorised consumption could be as high as 29% of the total domestic water supplied in South Africa (which excludes irrigation and bulk users). This highlights a serious challenge, and I am told that the situation is equally challenging internationally.

Over the past few years, the Water Research Commission, in partnership with my Department, has invested in developing advanced and pragmatic tools and methodologies to quantify and assess water losses. These developments assist us in working towards more credible and accurate estimates in a cost efficient manner. A recent research output undertook an extensive nation-wide study for the assessment of, and causes of non-revenue water in South Africa, with a particular focus on municipal water supply systems. The study highlights the root causes, nature and extent of estimated water losses in the various water use categories. This will assist us to design relevant interventions to improve the situation.

The extent of water losses, wastages and inefficient use of water is negatively affecting the ability of municipalities to provide sustainable services; conversely successful receipt of water income by municipalities could dramatically improve their financial position. My Department is, therefore, looking at how we can support municipalities to implement water conservation measures. To date, an amount of R45 million has been allocated to municipalities as part of the flagship pilot on Water Conservation and Water Demand Management implementation. A minimum of eight municipalities selected across the various regions will receive this support as a national pilot for the coming financial year. The success of this pilot would determine the benefits for us in establishing a Water Conservation and Water Demand Management fund for municipalities.

We are also in the process of developing a National Water Use Efficiency Information System to assist in monitoring the water use efficiency trends in our country at local, provincial and national scale to be able to identify areas of interventions. This Information System will play a critical role in creating a water saving South Africa, with a dedicated interactive educational tool for water users to learn and share information on efficient water use best practices and initiatives. We look forward to this System being in place by next year's Water Week. For it to be successful we will need stakeholders to proactively engage with my Department and supply information.

7. Regulations

Programme Director we have studied experiences from elsewhere in the world and in our Southern African Development Community (SADC) region to see how to sensibly develop National Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Regulations. The process of drafting the regulations is underway and we hope to get your inputs on them during the course of the Indaba. It is anticipated that the draft regulations will be ready for consultation during the course of this year and that they will be in force next year.

The aim of these regulations is to set national standards and foster a common approach to development and implementation of Water Conservation and Water Demand Management across water use sectors. Once in place these will enable local government to further standardise and translate these regulations into local by-laws for local enforcement and monitoring, with my Department's support.

We are also establishing a National Water Conservation and Water Demand Management Advisory Committee to support and advise my Department in this huge task, to create and entrench the culture of Water Conservation and Water Demand Management, not only amongst water users, but also among water management and water services institutions.

8. Communication

Ladies and Gentlemen, we understand that without comprehensive community awareness, support and understanding, even the most sophisticated approaches and interventions will not work. There is therefore a need to communicate the importance of conserving water to every sector of South African society. My Department has therefore implemented a dynamic new strategy to communicate this message to establish greater awareness of water conservation, but more importantly, it will call people to action. This strategy is implemented under the banner of a National Waterwise Campaign, a brochure of which is included in our conference packs, with a summary of the aims of each phase of the strategy. You may have already seen our advertisements on television and radio.

As part of our awareness campaign we have adopted a Blue Ribbon in a droplet form, to symbolize South Africa's ongoing efforts to use water efficiently. I wish to invite all of you to take your Blue Ribbons out of your packs and put them on together, as a reflection of our commitment to a Waterwise South Africa, where water is recognised for its social and economic value, cared for and used wisely and well, for the benefit of our children, and our children's children.

9. Conclusion

To conclude, ladies and gentlemen, Mahatma Gandhi once said "If we go on using the Earth uncaringly and without replenishing it, then we are just greedy consumers. We should take from the Earth only what are our absolute and basic necessities: things without which we cannot survive. The Earth has an abundance of everything, but our share in it is only what we really need". Gandhi lived his life on these principles and there is a lot we can learn from his example.

President Mbeki in his 2007 State of the Nation Address said in the context of addressing the backlogs of service delivery, "We will continue to confront these challenges so as to erase in our country that which is ugly and repulsive so that together we can speak of freedom and the happiness that comes with liberty."

I wish to reiterate and make a strong call upon all of us to commit ourselves to using our water sustainably, efficiently, and equitably.

Finally, I want to thank our sponsors and organisers of this Indaba, particularly Rand Water for partnering with us in this event. I would also like to recognise Plumbing SA for volunteering their monthly news magazine for a dedicated Department of Water Affairs and Forestry Column to communicate Water Conservation and Water Demand Management issues.

I thank you.