

Policy Review Debate on Budget Vote 34 of 2008/09
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
National Council of Provinces, Parliament, Cape Town, Western Cape
18 June 2008

Honourable Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces
Honourable Members
Ladies and Gentlemen

1. Introduction

Let me remind this house that the ANC in 2004 committed to the people of South Africa that if elected, it would provide more households with water and speed up the provision of water and sanitation; provide free basic water; invest in infrastructure to enhance the competitiveness of our economy; facilitate broad based economic empowerment; create jobs through the expanded public works programme and create a better life for our people. I believe that my Department has gone a long in achieving these policy objectives and through the work we do and the budget allocation we continue to change peoples' lives for the better. Our work supports the delivery of clean water and adequate sanitation and our activities in the forestry sector continue to make a positive impact on the lives of ordinary South Africans. We are well aware of the many backlogs still faced by our people; in particular, women, children, the youth and people living with disabilities and we are committed to working in a 'business unusual' manner to address these backlogs.

2. Water and Sanitation to Households and Clinics

The impact of bringing clean water and adequate sanitation to a household has a far reaching impact on health and hygiene. We have seen this impact when we have visited communities and interacted with them. Very recently during our Sanitation Week I visited Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal and witnessed the difference water and sanitation services has made to that community, in particular the alternative technology used for the provision of sanitation.

We have seen the positive impact on communities as a result of having ensured that all clinics in South Africa now have water and sanitation services; this impact was clear when we visited a clinic in the Amatole District Municipality in the Eastern Cape. The 91 clinics that had no access to basic water supply, and the 110 clinics that did not have access to basic sanitation, have now been provided with these essential services. A further 254 clinics that had facilities below required standards had their infrastructure upgraded to acceptable standards. Whilst celebrating these achievements we forged ahead to remove the backlog in services to schools and to date we have serviced 69 schools which had no access to basic water supply and 51 schools which had no basic sanitation. The impact on the lives of these learners and their ability to perform at school as a result of having adequate sanitation services is significant.

During this International Year of Sanitation we are committed to working as business unusual to further extend the gains we have made in providing sanitation. Last year in partnership with provincial government and municipalities we successfully removed 94% of bucket toilets in the established formal areas and we remain committed to remove the remaining backlog of 23 083 buckets in the Free State, Northern Cape and Eastern Cape by September 2008.

We are now seeing approximately one million more people receiving access to both water and basic sanitation services every year and we are very proud of our achievement in having met the Millennium Development Goals target of halving the population of people without water and sanitation. Access to water services has improved from 59% to 88% and basic sanitation from 48% to 73%. Since 1994 to date we have now serviced 18,7 million people with water and 10,9 million people with access to basic sanitation. I am encouraged by the leadership and

commitment of MECs, Mayors, Premiers and Councillors in all the Provinces in ensuring that Water and Sanitation services' delivery gets priority.

It is important that we work very hard to ensure that Provinces and municipalities are able to meet our targets and are given all the support they require in doing so. Part of our support has seen us deploying engineers to municipalities across the country, training 80 Sewerage Treatment Plant Operators in the Free State, and supporting municipalities to ensure that they deliver quality and up to standard drinking water to their communities. We are also deploying our Water Boards to areas where particular problems have emerged; with Bloem Water and Amatola Water Boards forming part of an intervention initiative that is meant to address water quality challenges experienced by the Ukhahlamba and Ndlambe District Municipalities, and the expertise of Rand Water is being used to assist with the problems faced in Delmas.

The Quality of our Drinking Water is a priority for us and significant progress has been made to establish DWAF as the Water Services Regulator. Through our efforts alongside the Institute of Municipal Engineers and with the support of SALGA a challenging two year project to monitor all 169 Water Services Authorities (WSAs) on their Drinking Water Quality has been successfully put in place. To date close to 90% of all WSA's are submitting their drinking water data on a timeous and ongoing basis. The result has been an overall improvement in the quality of drinking water and the creation of an enabling environment to ensure the effective management of drinking water. Of those municipalities on the system close to 95% report that their water quality complies with the national drinking water standard. The achievements here are impressive as a survey in 2005 showed only 50% of municipalities had this information, and the successful implementation of this system has been recognised both locally and internationally and DWAF and its partners having received two awards in recent weeks, one from the National Science and Technology Forum and the second from the International Water Association.

As a priority we are giving attention to the municipalities that are not reporting and those where drinking water quality failures have been detected. Drinking water quality is not something we can compromise on and I will be further engaging Municipalities at a Municipal Indaba to be held later in the year.

Honourable Members, to ensure sufficient water for municipalities, my department has in recent years put a huge effort into the planning of water supplies for metropolitan areas and other large towns. The "Reconciliation Strategy Studies" are comprehensive planning studies aimed at determining the future water demands of these areas. The conclusions of these studies point to the need to expand our efforts in water conservation and demand management, gear up on the use of appropriate technology in order to achieve water efficiency, and consider the re-use of waste water in the coastal areas. This option has already been identified for further study in the municipal areas of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Bay, Buffalo City and Ethekwini.

Last year we ran a pilot programme on water conservation and demand management in Emfuleni, Ekurhuleni, Mogale City, in Gauteng; and Lephalele and Lebowakgomo in Limpopo amongst others; and from the successes and water savings seen in these areas we will now be rolling out the programme. It is of critical importance that we create greater awareness amongst all of our citizens that we live in a water scarce country and we must all play our part in saving water. We need to change our behaviour and attitude and do the small things that will make a difference in the long run, e.g. do not leave the tap dripping; and when we are taking a shower or bath we need to use water sparingly.

3. Supporting the youth

Chairperson, two days ago at the Youth Day celebrations, marking the 32nd anniversary of June 16, President Mbeki said, "Whereas the youth of 1976 used stones and barricades against repressive forces, today's youth should use education and skills to fight poverty and unemployment." My department has been supporting efforts to develop the youth by creating

opportunities for learning through various programmes. Our efforts are also responding to the challenge of scarcity of skills, especially in the technical fields, which has been identified as a risk area for both government and the private sector. As promised in 2007, my Department established the Water and Forestry Academy and has an intake of 122 graduates, who will benefit immensely from workplace experience, and will be able to register as professional engineers or technicians. We have forged partnerships with 9 higher education institutions and 2 professional bodies and have awarded 105 bursaries to students studying towards qualifications in the technical fields. We have also been supporting the Energy and Water SETA and FIETA (the Forestry SETA) as part of our efforts to address the skills shortage in these sectors.

Through the Baswa le Meetse Awards, which targets primary school learners and the South African Youth Water Prize targeting high schools we are creating awareness on water and forestry issues and promoting careers in these sectors. Through the efforts we have reached 460 000 learners nationally. In the Eastern Cape alone our youth empowerment programmes have reached a total of 916 schools in the region.

4. Support to Resource Poor/Emerging Farmers

Chairperson, water gives life and it also creates economic opportunities. In recognition of the need to provide support to resource poor emerging farmers we supported a land claim project in Hoedspruit, Limpopo in 2007/8 which benefited 500 individuals. In the Northern Cape financial assistance to the value of R2.3 million was given to farmers through the Vaalharts, Kakamas and Boegoeberg water user associations. We are also continuing with our Water Allocation Reform programme and in the Mhlathuze River Catchment in KwaZulu-Natal, we have provided sufficient water for 4,000 hectares of new irrigation for emerging farmers.

In the Free State, DWAF has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of Land Affairs and Agriculture, paving the way for the joint implementation of water allocation reform. Feasibility studies for the revitalization of the Thaba 'Nchu Scheme and for the allocation of 3000 ha of water rights from the Orange River are nearing their completion.

5. Resource Protection

Honourable members, our ability to successfully allocate water for economic development requires that we develop our water resources and we protect those scarce water resources we have. This protection includes preventing unlawful water use particularly in the irrigation sector. For example in the Vaal River system the unlawful use is equivalent to the yield of the Mohale dams in the Lesotho Highlands Water Project or the amount of water that can be supplied to approximately 8.5 million households using 100 litres per day. We are moving with measures to curb this unlawful water use.

Our second area of water resource protection is to fight pollution of water resources. Here we are implementing the Waste Discharge Charge System and stepping up our efforts as regulator by combating non-compliance and we are increasing the capacity of our enforcement unit.

We are taking our role as regulator seriously and will be taking a tough stance with regard to transgressions. Pollution in all its forms cannot be tolerated and in dealing with pollution we will leave no stone unturned. Chairperson, the Nema amendment, brought to the House in collaboration with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, is one of the initiatives aimed at strengthening my hand as the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in curbing the growing scourge of pollution. This task is huge and I need all the support and tools necessary and hence my appeal for the House to support us in our efforts to protect and conserve this national resource. I am looking forward to the deliberations of the Select Committee in this regard.

Unfortunately some of the pollution is as a result of sewage spills into our water resources by municipal waste water treatment plants. While as regulator we must take a tough stance because of the negative impact of the sewage spills on the health of community and environment, we recognise the challenges in local government and we offer support to the affected municipality with emergency, short term measures such as minor refurbishments to contain the problem and to assist them with the drafting of comprehensive longer term water and sewage infrastructure master plans. All the actions are undertaken in close co-operation with the relevant municipalities, the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

Honourable Members, another important initiative to protect our water resources is the Working for Water programme, which during the last financial year cleared 140,000 hectares of new areas and provided almost 550,000 hectares of follow-up treatment on areas previously cleared.

6. Development of Water Resources Infrastructure

Chairperson, we need to develop and expand our water resource infrastructure to meet the increasing demand for water as our economy grows and the standard of living of our communities improve. My Department has a responsibility to ensure that there is enough water to support economic growth, water to meet social needs and this will mean the development of new infrastructure and the rehabilitation and upgrading of our existing infrastructure, and we will be spending in the current year R 1.2 billion on the establishment of new water resource infrastructure and R 415 million on rehabilitation of existing infrastructure.

My Department is progressing well with the Hluhluwe, Inyaka and Nandoni Government Water Works which will provide 2.4 million people with drinking water in the rural communities of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Limpopo Provinces. And starting this financial year are the Mdloti River Development project; raising of the Hazelmere Dam; development of the Mooi-Mgeni system; and construction of the Komati Abstraction Works and Pipeline for water supply to the ESKOM's Duvha Power Station in Mpumalanga.

To support our efforts to provide infrastructure which is needed to meet the ASGISA growth target and to ensure a well developed and maintained water resources infrastructure we are seeking to establish a National Water Resources Infrastructure Agency. The Bill to establish this agency has been tabled in the National Assembly and is under consideration by Parliament. The proposed establishment of an Agency was decided after due consideration of many alternative options to best manage the water resource infrastructure in the country and it will see the incorporation of the work of the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) and the infrastructure branch of DWAF. One of the benefits of such an agency is that it will better be able to attract finance from capital markets for the development of water resource infrastructure, which will then free up government funds to be channelled towards social development needs.

7. Forestry

Chairperson, in Forestry we are continuing with our plans to increase the area under afforestation. The Department is undertaking an extensive study to assess the potential for afforestation in the country. This study will provide empirical information on which parts of the country are suitable for afforestation. In areas where land suitability for afforestation has been established, such as the Eastern Cape, great strides have been made in rolling-out the programme.

Less than a month ago we signed with Broad-Based BEE Charter for the Forestry Sector, which will go a long way to creating more opportunities for black people in forestry and to the expansion of the sector. The department is very supportive of initiatives to include communities into empowerment programmes and we have also seen some of our own forests being transferred to dispossessed communities. As part of the settlement of a successful land restitution claim we

have recently transferred the ownership of the forest assets to the Mbazwana-Manzengwenya community in northern KZN.

Forestry remains an important contributor to economic growth and to the development of rural communities and through our forestry enterprise development programmes we will be providing support. For example, in Gauteng a nursery cooperative was initiated and is in the process of registration, and in North West, a turn-around strategy, including the planting of hybrid Eucalyptus has been compiled for the Mooifontein plantation. In Limpopo, the Vhembe and Mopani Small Growers established and registered a cooperative, which is an encouraging move as it will result in small growers equipping themselves to compete in the market.

Chairperson, last year Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces experienced devastating veld fires with a total of 63 964 hectares of plantation area burnt in 2007, a significant increase over previous years and it badly affected the industry. To combat veld fires, a total of 20 fire associations and National Fire Danger Rating Flags in 12 schools have been established. Later this year, my Department will roll out the National Fire Danger Rating System in collaboration with the South Africa Weather Service to serve as an early warning system for the likelihood of the occurrence of veld and forest fires.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, our efforts to create a better life for our people have seen us using local skills and businesses in many of our projects, and during the past financial year we created 24 249 jobs, 8 485 for women and 8 443 youths through the National Sanitation Programme. We created 30210 jobs through the Working for Water programme (16,349 (56%) for of the jobs were occupied by women; 6, 680 (38%) by youths and 599 (3%) people with disability). We also created 1350 jobs through the Working on Fire programme, and as we celebrate youth day we recognise the employment opportunities created in the construction of water infrastructure, which has created 1384 jobs for the youth.

Finally, I would like to thank the Director-General of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Ms. Pam Yako and her management team for their support, and to the staff in the department for their hard work and commitment. I would also like to thank the Select Committee on Land and Environmental Affairs, under leadership of Honourable Moatshe, for the important oversight work that it performs over our department.

Chairperson, honourable members, I request the House to support my department's budget of R6.6 billion.

I thank you.