

Budget Vote of 2009/10
Speech by Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, Minister of Water and Environmental
Old Assembly Chamber, Cape Town, Western Cape
24 June 2009

Honourable Speaker
Honourable Members
Ladies and Gentlemen

WATER IS LIFE – SECURING THE NATION'S NEEDS ACROSS GENERATIONS

Kindly allow me, Honourable Speaker, to premise my address to this august assembly by stating a simple but profound fact of life. Water is life, without water, there is no life. Our world renowned Constitution, the supreme law of the land, exhorts us to uphold access to water as a right for everyone (section 27 (1) (b)). I may as well add that water is key to economic development and the attainment of a better life. To this end, the ruling party, the ANC, at its Polokwane Conference highlighted, amongst others, water allocation reform and water resource management which “must be integral when planning municipalities”, as key deliverables for our responsive government. This was also reinforced by the State President, JG Zuma in his State of the Nation Address to the joint Sitting of Parliament on June 2009.

Another simple but incontrovertible fact worth mentioning is that our beloved South Africa is a water scarce country. In the face of the prevalent global economic crisis and the social contract we sealed on the 09 May 2009 with the people of this country and the concomitant rallying call to work together for a better life, a new and sophisticated level of thinking and action pertaining to water is required. Our challenge here is not so much to invent as it is to alter the way we think and act on how we use our water! We don't have the luxury of choice and time unfortunately – we must act NOW and do that decisively.

Exactly a week ago, we were at this house presenting the environment policy statement. We return this morning even more determined to deal earnestly with challenges and opportunities affecting the water sector in this, the Budget Vote of Water Affairs.

Firstly, we will deal decisively with wrong-doers!

Henceforth, we are adopting a “zero tolerance” on environment and water crimes. This campaign will be bolstered by our commitment to return environmental courts. We are in discussion with the Justice Portfolio and other law enforcement agencies to realize this and within eight months we will see results.

We are in the process of expanding the mandate of environmental management inspectors to include the water aspect. The emergence of a single enforcement unit arising from the integration of Blue and Green Scorpions will strengthen our resolve against wrong -doers.

We are going to apply the “polluter pays” principle with renewed vigour to ensure that culprits committing pollution, illegal water use, and other environmental and water crimes don't go unpunished.

We will accelerate the Water Allocation Reform programme!

Water is not only central but is also an excellent catalyst for development. It is for this reason that our water allocation programme will be playing a pivotal role in supporting government's priorities in rural development and land reform.

The department will avail water to support the pilot rural development programme announced by the by the State President in Limpopo. We are already in discussion with the Deputy Minister of Forestry, Agriculture and Fisheries regarding the role of agriculture as a major water user in our economy. Our aim is to rationalise water use and ensure equity of distribution. Ngoluhlobo sakube sincipeda nabalimi abasakhulayo ukubanika isixa samanzi esifanele umsebenzi abawenzayo wokulima nokufuya njengoko amanzi ebalulekile kwimpumelelo yabo njengosomashishini. In this regard, we will also meet stakeholders like AGRI SA, emerging farmers and other relevant stakeholders in our attempt to deal with this matter as inclusively as possible.

We are also looking closely at the issue of single purpose dams which are located within communities who have no ready access to water. We have completed a study in Taung. We are ready to commission the dam so it can benefit the communities. We will do this throughout the country where such problems exist.

We will intensify our efforts to maintain acceptable standards in our drinking water quality!

My first official function in the portfolio was to hand out certificates to 22 municipalities that qualified for Blue Drop Certification. This is a clear indication of the route that the department is taking in ensuring that the water sector is well regulated.

Through this programme and especially the efforts of all involved, we have managed to raise the profile of drinking water quality and to name and shame those who are not complying. Municipal reporting has increased and the sector achieved an average of 93.3% compliance with microbiological limits of the national standard (SANS 241).

As a result most municipalities are tightening their monitoring programmes to ensure that they comply with national norms and standards. Although the focus has been on drinking water quality, we have started assessments on Waste Water Treatment works to ensure compliance with effluent quality standards. We intend to intensify this work to ensure that our water quality standards are not compromised especially with the hosting of the 2010 FIFA soccer world cup.

Noxa silisebe siza kuyenza lemigudu, sikwacela kwisizwe sethu ukuba sisebenzisane ukugada ukungcoliswa kwamanzi ngandlela zonke. Abantu mabayeke ukulahla izinto ezingcolileyo kwimilambo nakwimijelo yamanzi ekufutshane kubo. Okwangoku isesisicelo esi kodwa ukuba abantu bakuhlala ukuthi gqolo ukungcolisa amanzi nokuweba, mabazi ukuba sizisa umthetho ongqingqwa oyakusincipeda ukuphelisa lomikhuba.

We will respond to the call to increase access and build adequate infrastructure!

The State President has reiterated the message that communities in rural areas and poor townships deserve an equal chance of access to basic amenities like water, sanitation, electricity and recreational facilities. To this end, we are investing R500m in a programme to intervene in high risk areas where there are water challenges. This special intervention programme focuses on the following areas:

- Aging infrastructure that leads to discharge of sewerage into our rivers,
- Water Conservation in stressed systems like the Vaal and Umgeni,
- Areas where there is illegal abstraction, e.g. Upper Vaal,
- Areas where there is no infrastructure and communities are vulnerable to water borne diseases.

This investment will address sewerage spillages, target specific treatment facilities, asset management and provide much needed technical assistance to municipalities. We have identified nodal areas for focused interventions and these have been chosen based on the extent of need for refurbishment, the extent of sewage spillages and the age and dilapidation of infrastructure.

We will continue to invest in infrastructure for social and economic development!

Honourable Speaker, in the next 5-8 years, the Department will spend approximately R 30 billion on the continuing construction and establishment of fifteen (15) mega water resources infrastructure projects, increasing the capacity of existing water resources infrastructure to provide water to strategic installations such as the energy sector (Eskom), the industrial sector (Sasol), and the mining sector and for domestic purposes.

Additional infrastructure programmes include an accelerated programme for the construction of the De Hoop Dam, the continued partnership with the government of Lesotho for the implementation of the proposed phase 2 of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, implementation of the project to augment supply of water to Lephalale for use by ESKOM and other petrochemical industries

Water Security and Security of Supply Remains high on our agenda!

Honorable Speaker, we are a water scarce country and our water resources are finite. We cannot afford an uncoordinated programme of blue-sky water-thirsty projects. We need to be prudent in the management of this resource since the primary source is rainfall which cannot be guaranteed by decree. Having said that, we are working hard to ensure that there is security of supply to provide water for the growth of our economy as well as social development.

It is for this reason that our Department has come up with a Framework that will ensure that our water resources are managed sustainably to meet future demands. Within the context of this strategy, we are embarking on the following programmes:

- We will look at Diversification of our water mix, ensuring that we explore other sources of supply e.g. desalination of sea water in coastal areas; strengthening effluent reuse etc.
- Intensify public awareness about the value of water – we need to instill a culture of responsibility and change of attitude and behaviour on water.
- We will conserve water by curbing water losses by at least 20% in 2014.

Sihlaba ikhwelo kubantu bonke baqaphele ukuba ilizwe lethu alinamanzi. Iimvula esizifumanayo azisiniki manzi awonele yonke imisebenzi esiyenzayo sililizwe. Ithetha ukuthi lonto amanzi esiwafumanayo masiwonge.

Lemeko yokunqongophala kwamanzi yenziwa maxongo nanagakumbi zimeko zembalela ezihamba nenkqubo yokuguquka kwemo zezulu kwilizwekazi liphela, into apha amakhumsha ayibiza iclimate change. Siza kubuya sileli sebe sibafundise abantu belilizwe ukuze babenolwazi oluphangaleleyo ngale climate change. Okwangoku, sebenzisa amanzi ngononophelo mhlali !

- We will act hard and decisively against defaulters and punish wrongdoing.
- We will strengthen our regulatory capacity and assist municipalities.

Building the capacity of the state to deliver!

We realize that none of the above can be achieved without strong partnerships with other Departments and with the private sector. We also appreciate the negative impact of lack of skills has on service delivery. The department is doing its best working with the private sector and other countries to ensure that we build the required pool of skills to take the South African water sector forward.

Of course to achieve this, you need a motivated workforce and an organization that is systematically geared up to perform. Internally we have initiated what we call a change journey which aims at rekindling the culture of commitment and service, improvement of our business

processes and the creation of a dynamic culture of transparency, respect and excellence for everyone.

I Thank You! Enkosi!