

KwaZulu-Natal Water Week 2010

**Key Note address by Honourable Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs,
Ms Buyelwa Sonjica**

Event: Ngcebo Water Scheme Official Opening and Sod Turning Ceremony

16 March 2010

Programme Director
Honourable Premier
Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature
Honourable Mayors and Councillors
Members of the House of Traditional Leaders
Leaders of Water Boards
Senior officials
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and gentlemen.

I thank you very much for inviting me here today to celebrate the National Water Week in this year that we will also proudly host the 2010 Soccer World Cup. Each year during Water Week, we take time to celebrate and remember that water is life, and water is central to our country's socio-economic development.

Our government has prioritized five areas that we need to urgently address and today I want us to remember the importance of water in each of these areas.

Water is critical in education. Women and especially children are faced with the burden of collecting water which often prevents them attending school and obtaining an education. Education is also essential in ensuring that our people understand the importance of water and why the scarce resource should be used sparingly and not wasted. South Africa is one of the 30 driest countries in the world and economic growth and climate change will reduce the already limited water we have available. Water is so

scarce and precious that for years it has been predicted that the next world war will be fought over water!

Along with education; water is crucial to the provision and promotion of primary health. Clean and safe drinking water contributes to the improvement in our quality of life. Water is crucial in creating work opportunities and sustainable livelihoods, rural development, food security and land reform. The fight against corruption includes preventing the illegal use of water so that other downstream users are no longer disadvantaged.

There is no better place to be reminded of the hardship and suffering that our people without access to basic water have endured than here, in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, and I am sure I don't need to convince you of the importance of water!

We are proud of the great progress we have made in bringing water to our people, but we still have a long way to go, with some 640 000 households in the Province still without access to basic water, and 930 000 households without basic sanitation services. We are facing many challenges with the speed at which we are able to deliver services to those still suffering, and also with our ability to maintain the infrastructure that has been provided.

The limitation at national level of development funding, the capacity of Local Government, and competition for scarce resources have all contributed to our progress being slower than we would like. In order to overcome these challenges and the new ones that will present themselves and test our resolve, we need to work together, because TOGETHER WE CAN SAVE MORE.

Together we can save more children from hardship, together we can save more children from being deprived of education, together we can save more people from diseases, from poverty and from hunger. Together we can save more water! Together we can save more water resources!

To succeed we must work together in the true spirit of cooperative governance between all spheres of government.

In terms of delivery of water and sanitation services within the limits of the available resources, KwaZulu-Natal municipalities and the Ilembe District Municipality (DM) have a good track record. During the previous financial year, the Water Services Authorities in this province utilised 97% of the R 1,5 billion that was allocated to them under the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) programme, 85% (R1.3 billion) of which was spent on water and sanitation services infrastructure. This is by far the best performance of local government in all provinces, and with only one month remaining in this financial year, I have been advised that progress is good and a similar level of performance is anticipated. Premier, MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Municipalities, Water Boards and my Department in this province, keep up the good cooperation; it is delivering good results!

Today, I am honoured to be here with you to celebrate two very important events; that is; the opening of the Ngcebo Water Scheme and later today, the sod turning which will mark the commencement of the implementation of the KwaMaphumulo Bulk Water Supply Scheme.

A number of you are aware of the extended history of the Ngcebo Scheme which was originally prioritised for implementation in 1998 as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme's Community Water Supply and Sanitation Programme with a budget of only R500 000. Challenges such as limited resources and huge backlogs have contributed delays in ensuring access to all our people at once. However, perseverance and working together has finally triumphed and we now celebrate with the 17 000 people who have access to a reliable water service.

The Ngcebo Rural Water Supply Scheme implemented by Ilembe DM originally comprised four phases, with the high lying areas of KwaHlongwa, Ekhuthandzeni,

Mambulu and Ekatha being added to the project later. A further phase is to be implemented shortly to expand the scheme into the community of Mangongo and Mati. Implementation of these reticulation networks began in 2006, with three phases completed to date, and the fourth phase nearing completion. A further and final phase will be implemented during 2010.

The 400 standpipes that form part of this project are fed from the Ngcebo Bulk Water Supply Scheme which is being implemented by Umgeni Water. This project comprises upgrading of abstraction works on the uThukela River, upgrading of water treatment works and pumping system, concrete reservoirs, 21km of bulk supply pipelines and take-off points.

Our second celebration today marks the start of the KwaMaphumulo Bulk Water Supply Scheme, utilising a dam which will be developed on the Imvutshane stream, a secondary tributary of the Mvoti River. The bulk scheme will be implemented in 5 phases and will provide a sustainable and reliable supply of potable water to the rural communities located in and around the town of KwaMaphumulo including Masibambisane, Kwasizabantu, Maqumbi, Ngcebo 2 and Ashville at a total project cost of R320 million.

It may be confusing to some as to why Umgeni and Ilembe are both responsible for the provision of water to your area and I would like to clarify their roles. Umgeni Water is a Water Board or Bulk Water Provider that has been established by my Department in terms of the Water Services Act, 1997 (Act No. 108 of 1997). Its main function is the provision of bulk treated water to municipalities. In this province, Umgeni Water is providing this area, Ethekwini Metropolitan Municipality, Umgungundlovu DM, Ugu DM, Sisonke DM and Umsunduzi LM with bulk water. The huge volumes that they supply and the large area they cover makes it possible for them to specialise in this function and provide very good quality water at good prices. Without this partnership we may have waited even longer for the R40million investment in Ngcebo and R320 million KwaMaphumulo development.

In November 2009, we held a very successful Water Indaba in this province. The purpose of the Indaba was to debate the challenges we face and to agree on the best action plan to meet the needs of all water users. I am pleased with the action plan that has been developed which includes the need for an updated bulk water provision plan for the province and the establishment of a Provincial Water Committee that will become a committee of the Premier's Co-ordinating Forum. This plan should align the provincial and national priorities with the district level priorities to ensure a more coordinated approach to water services delivery and the transformation of the water sector for effective socio-economic growth in the Province.

In conclusion I would like to congratulate you on the completion of this project and wish you well with the implementation of the KwaMaphumulo bulk project. May this clean and pure water bring education, health, happiness, food security, safety and prosperity to you all!

I thank you.