

Budget Vote Address

By Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs

At the National Council of Provinces, Parliament, Cape Town

27 May 2010

Honourable Chairperson of the NCOP

Honourable Chairperson of the Select Committee

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction – “Our Thirsty World and the Need for Enduring Partnerships”

The world will descend on our shores in less than 14 days amidst reports that by 2025, “1.8 billion people will live in areas where water is scarce”. This Honourable Members clearly depicts the “Thirsty World” referred to by the recent issue of the National Geographic. I hope that during their stay, we will teach the world a thing or two about the importance of partnerships and shared responsibility in tackling water issues.

Allow me Honourable Chair to remind this house of our shared constitutional responsibility towards water management in South Africa. As national government, we are the custodians of water resources management but local government has the primary responsibility to put the pipes, to maintain them and to deliver quality potable and safe water to households and other users.

Quite often, these constitutional roles get blurred especially when there is a challenge of the fulfillment of our various mandates. Even confronted with these challenges, we do not seek to extricate ourselves from the commitment to support local government in the delivery of water to South Africans. Our support of the local government turn around strategy is in fact premised firmly on that commitment and the pledge we made during our countrywide stakeholder road shows.

Honourable Members will appreciate that this support to local government is limited and guided by the budgeting process of government.

Our Water is fit for Consumption for All our citizens and the visiting Nations of the World

I am sure the Honourable Members are aware that in this country, our crystal clear drinking water is not hidden in dangerous mountain ranges and other secret locations. Our water here is found on tap and it is for this reason that we should intensify Programmes like the blue drop certification for our drinking water quality, which we introduced almost two years ago as an incentive based regulation of our municipal drinking water business.

We are even more encouraged that our municipalities have intensified their own efforts to ensure improved water quality as reflected in the 2010 Host Cities Blue Drop Report. The assessment period saw 94% of all Water Services Authorities being assessed in comparison with the 66% in the previous reporting cycle. This speaks directly to the commitment of most municipalities and their sterling efforts at improving on their drinking water quality responsibilities.

Honourable Members will be pleased to hear that in total thirty-eight (38) water supply systems obtained the prestigious Blue Drop Award for the 2010 assessment cycle, which is a 40% improvement from 2009. It is unfortunate that nine (9) water supply systems lost their Blue Drop status for this assessment period but we are encouraged by the fact that we have twenty-four (24) new Blue Drop certified systems in 2010.

I however wish to clarify that the quality of water in those systems which fail to obtain Blue Drop status, is not necessarily poor or unsafe to drink. What it means to us is that we need to focus more on areas that require improvement in the systems.

Accordingly, we are working closely with those municipalities that still have challenges to improve systems so that they are able to meet the required standard but we are also assisting the good and excellent performers maintain the good quality standards.

We Must Hold Hands to Fix the State of Our Waste Water Systems

As I had mentioned during the release of Green Drop Report last month, we did not suddenly wake up to the news that our waste water treatment works needed urgent intervention. The report is in fact our own initiative as a department aimed at assessing the state of our waste water systems and to devise interventions to deal with the challenges as identified therein.

The 2009 Green Drop assessments found that 203 waste water services systems out of the 449 (45%) assessed scored better than 50% measured against the stringent set criteria. 7.4% of all waste water systems were classified as excellently managed which is encouraging and proving that the benchmark is not an impossible feat.

We must therefore Honourable Chair appreciate the findings of the report as an indication to strengthen our joint efforts to deal with these problems. It is a fact that some and most of these problems are not of our own making.

The design capacity of some of these systems has been stretched to the limit due to population growth and other economic factors. Shortcomings in the local government funding model as well as the skills deficit in the labour market exacerbate the problem even further.

We are also glad that this report has brought matters of waste water treatment firmly to the fore of the local government turn around strategy. For far too long, little effort and time was spent on the operations and maintenance of these systems and it is indeed

pleasing to put greater focus on these, so that we are able to identify funding requirements and other interventions to improve their management.

Honourable Members, we are also strengthening our institutional oversight capacity so that we can make the required positive impact in water delivery especially through our Water Boards. I am accordingly pleased to mention that all Water Boards, with the exception of two, are financially viable and this presents adequate leverage to enhance delivery of water at local government level.

Our Investment drive in water infrastructure is on course

Honourable Members, the department has completed a supply and demand analysis on the status of the water resources within the five Metros. The department plans to complete seven new bulk raw water augmentation projects during 2010/2014 MTEF.

To date, 35 regional bulk water schemes are under construction of which 10 will be completed during 2010/11 financial year. Approximately 588 000 people will benefit from the 10 projects to be completed during 2010/11.

This work will contribute towards ensuring security of water supply for economic growth and social development. These projects will in total cost us approximately R13, 6 billion.

Conclusion

Honourable Members, we cannot afford to fail our people and falter on our President's promise to "never rest until every one of us has access to water". After all, it is in partnership with the masses of our people that we will deliver the promise of a better life for all.

I thank you.

