



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS MRS EDNA MOLEWA ON THE PROVINCIAL WATER CONFERENCE AT
BELA-BELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, AVENTURA FOREVER RESORT FROM 19 TO
20 AUGUST 2011 IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

Programme Director

Honourable Premier

Honourable members of the Provincial Executive Council

Honourable members of the Provincial Legislature

Director Generals and Head of Departments

Executive Mayors and Councilors

Traditional Leaders

Religious leaders from various denominations

Business leaders

Leaders of political parties present

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Since our 2009 Provincial Water Indaba held here in Polokwane, a number of developments have taken place. Government decided to focus on the following five priority areas: education, health, rural development and agrarian reform, taking forward

the fight against crime and creating decent work. Although government has done well on these priorities, it remains a concern that unemployment and poverty still persist. To address these concerns, government declared 2011 a year of job creation through meaningful economic transformation and inclusive growth.

The Limpopo Employment and Growth and Development Plan (LEGDP) identifies economic growth and job creation as some of the key priority areas. Central to these key government priorities is the availability of water as an enabler of job creation and economic development, hence the theme for this conference ***“Adopting New Approaches in Water Management to enable job creation, economic growth and development”***

At our Provincial Water Indaba in 2009, we made commitments and came up with ways of aligning our strategies in order to meet the water challenges. As we deliberate in this water conference, I expect us to look at our commitments and find new ways in which we can unlock water challenges in the province to enable the kind of job creation and economic development that the LEGDP envisages.

Honourable Premier, my Department as a custodian of water and as the water sector leader, is poised to ensure that we support these noble efforts contained in the LEGDP. The National Water Act, of 1998 and the Water Services Act, of 1997 are pieces of legislation that enable us to realize our commitments to ensuring a better life for all. However I must admit though, in some instances our pieces of legislation have provided challenges in ensuring equitable allocation of this scarce resource but this will be addressed during the revision of these pieces of legislations which is in progress as we speak.

My Department is currently embarking on a review of the National Water Act, the Water Services Act, the National Water Resources Strategy and Water Research Act. The outcomes of these reviews will be to enable my Department to effectively deal with issues such as the ones I have already alluded to. This process is at an advanced stage and we anticipate finalising the process soon. Parallel to the review of the pieces of

legislation is also a project that we call Institutional Reform and Re-alignment. This project is aimed at realigning all water institutions in the country to ensure that they are able to effectively implement their respective mandates. I will therefore be very keen to hear what recommendations the commission on Legislation, policy and regulation will bring to the plenary after their deliberations.

Limpopo Province is not blessed with abundant water resources. In fact my Department informs me that the province is in deficit as we speak. Central to this challenge is whether water allocated to users has been used effectively and efficiently. Currently one of the challenges is that there is water that was allocated to users who are not utilising it. In some cases this water is being traded amongst users. As a result, on paper it appears like there is no available water to be re-allocated. This state of affairs is not sustainable in the long run. For example I am informed that in some parts of Limpopo, communities could have been given the land but the challenge is that the corresponding water was traded to another landowner. If government is to achieve its intended priorities then it must be in the interest of the country's citizens to be able to re-allocate water legally to those who deserve access to this resource. In this Province we must continue to pay particular attention to the allocation of water and the needs and aspirations of small farmers who were denied opportunities in the past

Water Resources Management is a national competency as water respects no boundaries and must be allocated in the interest of the nation as a whole. Many of the river systems in Limpopo are part of internationally shared water courses which require that we must comply with certain international protocols and agreements in developing and managing these river systems. Continuous consultation and negotiation with our neighboring states, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mozambique in line with SADC protocols is essential to ensure that we stimulate regional development and economic growth. The National Water Act (NWA) 36 of 1998 takes into consideration the protection of the resource for the future generations of this land. The protection of water resources is fundamentally related to their use, development, conservation, management and control.

The Limpopo Province is dubbed the “Eden of Africa” due to the diverse biodiversity, heritage resources and beautiful aesthetic forms we have in this province. As a result of this diversity, Limpopo and South Africa as a whole, receives tourists from different parts of the world. The conservation and tourism linked to our biodiversity need to be protected for the continuous benefit of present and future generations. The Limpopo Provincial Parks, South African National Parks and Private Game Reserves in the Province have been able to keep the tourists’ interests in Limpopo and the sustainability of ecotourism should be a priority to all in the province and in the country.

To ensure that Limpopo continues to enjoy the status of the Eden of Africa, we must ensure that the Reserve is implemented in our river systems. My department has already completed the reserve in the Letaba catchment but we must speed up the determination and implementation of the reserve in the rest of the catchments in the province. This matter is receiving particular attention.

Deterioration of water quality is increasingly becoming a major challenge in the province. Municipal waste water treatment works that are discharging raw sewage or effluent of poor quality into our rivers present a critical challenge. Additionally, the quality of return flows mainly from irrigation systems also poses challenges. And whilst Acid Mine Drainage is not yet at critical levels in the province, it would be foolhardy if we do not start dealing with this potential threat immediately. I am heartened therefore to see that part of the discussion at this conference will deal with this important aspect of water quality. No matter how much water is available, if the water is of a poor quality, not only is our eco-system impacted on negatively but all aspects of the water cycle will be affected.

Honorable Premier, Your Employment, Growth and Development Plan acknowledges that first and foremost, all water service authorities in Limpopo with the technical support from my Department must ensure that the province has sound water conservation and demand management, waste water re-use, optimization of local sources including ground water, infrastructure asset management as well as management of water resources and associated infrastructure. If we are to realize the

goals in this LEGDP, we must ensure that our infrastructure is operated and maintained effectively.

My Department is aware of the fact that some of the Municipalities in the Province (Water Services Authorities) are faced with serious challenges with regards to service delivery to their consumers. It is absolutely critical that our resources and support programmes are integrated to ensure that these Municipalities are able to perform their functions as Water Services Authorities. Any existing capacity gaps must be dealt with and Municipalities must ensure that sufficiently skilled people are employed to deliver quality water services to their consumers. I am also aware that some municipalities in the province are experiencing problems with the management of sewage treatment works and water purification plants. I must emphasize that it is the responsibility of each Water Service Authority to ensure proper planning, budgeting and management of such infrastructure to prevent service delivery breakdowns and pollution incidents.

I am equally concerned about the levels of budgeting that most municipalities are applying for their operations and maintenance. Most research has shown that these levels are inadequate and must be improved. My contention Honorable Premier, is that if the issue of budgeting for maintenance is not effectively addressed, our new investments in Capital Infrastructure will bear little fruit. My Department together with stakeholders and sector partners have developed a Business Case for infrastructure maintenance which is available for stakeholders to use. I also anticipate that some of the deliberations at this conference will indeed provide municipalities with tangible solutions on how best to manage these assets that are critical to support the very livelihood of the Limpopo Province.

As this conference looks at the water requirements in support of the LEGDP, we must upfront acknowledge that government alone cannot be able to fund the massive water infrastructure investments that are required to grow the province's economy to the levels that are required. We must look at innovative ways in which we are going to fund this infrastructure. This province is blessed with mineral wealth such that the inflow of Capital investments into the Limpopo economy will be huge.

I am delighted to note that some of the participants here are from the mining sector. It is imperative that we as government explore ways in which we can partner with the private sector in funding and implementing these massive water capital infrastructure projects. Currently government, over and above the funding from the Treasury, also uses the commercial markets through the Trans Caledon Tunnel Authority to fund large infrastructure projects. Surely these cannot be the only funding sources or models available to us. I am therefore challenging this conference to come up with solutions on how we can realize our government's objectives of job creation, rural development, economic development and growth, access to water services by all through these capital investment programmes.

The key question to observe as we craft these solutions however is how the marginalized areas in the province can tap into or are pushed onto the power of the new economic frontier. Therefore, Regional Economic Development and Integration should focus fundamentally on addressing the key obstacles to the functioning of the economy, primarily through infrastructural interventions which will enable all areas to better access markets and resources and to attain the full economic potential of which they are capable of.

Honourable Premier in closing, I wish to highlight that, as a water sector leader my Department is committing itself to facilitate and participate in the Water Inter-governmental Forum where water issues will be discussed in the province. The forum serves as a platform through which DWA together with provincial government, municipalities, private sector, and civil society engage on water issues affecting different provinces. This initiative will indeed require buy-in and support from your office through assigning of the relevant Member of the Executive Council to drive and ensure the sustainability of this platform. I was informed that Limpopo Inter-governmental Forum will be launched later today. It is during the launch where all participating sector partners and stakeholders will sign a pledge that will ensure that a collaborative framework which address water challenges is sustained and kept at a strategic level to be able to engage on critical issues affecting the province.

Let this Water Conference be used to strengthen our National, Provincial and Local Government links and ensure that we attain our common objective of alleviating pain from the lives of our people and bring job creation, stability prosperity and economic development in Limpopo. It is my hope that we will together develop a detailed and implementable action plan that will ensure the speedy resolutions of key challenges and place us in a position to monitor our commitments at all levels of government.

Thank you.