



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR HONOURABLE DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER
AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MS REJOICE MABUDAFHASI DURING
THE OPENING OF THE SUSTAINABLE WATER RESOURCE CONFERENCE
AT THE EMPERORS PALACE**

16 AUGUST 2011

Programme Director
CEO's of Public Entities
Members of the Business Community
Distinguished Guests
Members of the media
Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this august event. It is in this month that we as government and as a nation pay tribute to the heroines of the apartheid struggle who marched to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest against oppressive apartheid laws. Women remain in the forefront of protecting and conserving our water resources.

South Africa faces similar developmental challenges to those of other countries, particularly those emerging economies who are struggling with infrastructure backlog, maintenance and water scarcity and or security. We are faced with a challenge of increasing population, increasing demand of water for economic growth and development whilst the amount of our water remains the same. If our

water resources are not well managed, protected, conserved and developed in a sustainable manner, we will have a water crisis, we will not achieve our Millennium Development Goals.

South Africa will need to act decisively in order to mitigate and adapt to climate change and must also use existing water resources more conservatively. Climate change will, and has already, impacted on many citizens of the world and we have seen tangible evidence of this over the last 12 to 18 months.

Our ability to deliver clean water services to every citizen of South Africa is therefore a function of the availability, security and predictability of our water resources but also a function of our ability to manage and conserve water effectively. It is therefore pleasing to see that these issues are gaining importance on the agendas of national and local government and within the realms of South African business and industry.

As many of you will know - the Department of Water Affairs has been mandated to amongst others: ensure that there is sufficient water, in both quantitative and qualitative terms, support South Africa's path of growth and development while at the same time, ensuring that every person in South Africa has access to potable water; and to achieve these concurrent goals without compromising the ecological sustainability of the resource.

Achieving these goals is more challenging due to erratic rainfall patterns with higher peaks and lower troughs, ostensibly as result of climate change. In the circumstances we will need to employ every possible measure on both the supply and demand side. Centralized supply side investments in infrastructure are being made but are expensive, highly impactful on the environment and take many years to roll out. Demand side interventions on the other hand can be

spread across agriculture, industry and consumers, each of whom benefits through cost savings and/or greater abundance.

Furthermore demand-side programmes, if widely implemented, will prolong the water resource far more profoundly than simply increasing supply.

I therefore applaud the efforts of this conference as a private sector initiative seeking to advance discussions as well as the market for water efficiency in South Africa.

It is also widely acknowledged that the solutions to the challenges that we face should incorporate a focus on technology, innovation and skills development. The Department endorses this and is investing resources in projects that reward innovation and promote skills development. Many of these projects are linked to communities who will be empowered as they feel included as part of the solution.

It is also a focal point to work with the youth of South Africa through youth and schools projects. These projects are extremely important and our future leadership is amongst this group.

By developing and implementing water conservation policies, programmes and regulations, local government is also playing an important role in changing the way that water is used reused and respected. These initiatives will also influence and ultimately unite the private sector towards a shared objective.

We can already see evidence of this as some organisations have taken up the challenge to drastically reduce their water footprint – there are case study presentations taking place at this event that are excellent examples of this. These initiatives should be recognized and praised and we should all support and encourage such leadership from whatever vantage point we operate.

In conclusion I would like to thank you for your time and for your attendance at this event, and to thank the organisers and all participants for creating this platform.

I wish you a successful conference and look forward to the feedback and the outcomes.

Thank you